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FREE TO BE: NORTH KOREAN MIGRANTS
AND THE SOUTH KOREAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the Christian conversion of North Korean migrants who arrive in South Korea by way of China in the context of a transforming Northeast Asia. In this dissertation I observe that while past anticommunist South Korean regimes have publicly celebrated North Korean defectors as national heroes and heroines, today it is only the evangelical church that invites them to criticize the North. I argue that North Korean migrants' conversion to Christianity is a cultural project with considerable political and ideological hues that reveals the key characteristics of South Korean anticommunist evangelical nationalism.

Based on 2006–2007 ethnographic fieldwork in Seoul, South Korea, and Yanbian, China, I approach evangelical nationalism as a process of “becoming” rather than “being” South Korean Christians. Therefore I approach the Cold War legacy and the politics of global Christianity through the personal trajectories of North Korean migrants. By focusing on the re-subjectification projects of individual migrants, I am able to demonstrate the ambiguity and contested process of Christian conversion.

My ethnography asserts that the evangelical church, in concert with international anticommunist and North Korean human rights advocates, renders North Korean migrants as “freed” from the communist regime, and “revives” their religiosity by replacing *Kimilsung-ism* (the ideology of Kim Il-sung) with South Korean Christianity. In turn, my study examines the migrants' evangelical conversion as a contest over what constitutes “true” or authentic Christianity and what Korean-ness should look like in a transforming East Asia.

At the heart of competing practices and discourses between North and South Korean Christians are unexpected cultural differences that undermine the myth of ethnic homogeneity and generate social discrimination. The call for spiritual integrity in turn is also complex: in the face of the decline and social critique of the South Korean church, some North Korean Christians have claimed a leadership role in “Korean” religious revival by evoking their “Christian passage,” namely a narrative of their escape from the North to the South through biblical language.

*To My Wife Her Sumi
and our son Jung-Huh Julian Doyeon*

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In this dissertation, I document the meeting of North Korean migrants and the South Korean evangelical church at a pivotal historical moment: when the prevailing cultural logic of the anti-North Korean Cold War ideology waned, and the public standing of the South Korean evangelical church faltered. The era of my dissertation research, however, is historical in that today the quite unpopular South Korean President, Lee Myung-bak (Yi Myŏngpak), has arguably reinstated a regime with both Cold War and evangelical accents. Nonetheless, the encounter I document here is one that I think speaks to the present situation and contains ethnographic truth.

As for Korean Romanization, I follow the McCune-Reischauer (MR) system which is widely accepted in the academy. The MR system is now available as an online dictionary initiated by the Council of East Asian Libraries.¹ Most of the Korean words in this dissertation have been Romanized with this system, except for some official names of people, places, and pronouns. For example, I use Yanbian instead of Yŏnbyŏn, for the Korean-Chinese Autonomous Prefecture in Northeast China, as it is written in most English media. Similarly, I use Juche instead of Chuch'e for the North Korean national ruling philosophy as it appears in North Korean official documents and websites. As for Korean names in references, I use their official Romanized names where possible.

This dissertation can be seen as only the first part of my long journey and a task I have worked on and will continue to engage. North Korean migrants who made this first part possible deserve my special appreciation. At the same time I have to confess how

¹ <http://www.romanization.org/>

painful it was to keep a “research distance” from those who were seeking immediate help in China and occasionally in South Korea. Many of them were very cautious about saying what they wanted, but nearly always said what they were expected to say. Nonetheless, beyond their verbal language I was able to feel, read, and share their feelings, agonies, criticisms, and hopes. Unfortunately, this dissertation is still largely an attempt to bring out their issues around the themes of religion and nationalism in the post-Cold War era and may not fully elaborate on the various issues at hand.

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researcher for a project on South Korean college student cosmopolitanism, and as a co-organizer of the University of Illinois Korean Workshop. Martin Manalansan inspired me to broaden my understandings of theories of refugees, diasporas, cultural citizenship, and identity politics. It was also my great pleasure to work as his teaching and research assistant, as those experiences gave me the chance to learn from his valuable theoretical insights and experience his passion for teaching. Ellen Moodie's warmhearted support and rigorous scholarship played a crucial role in the development of my arguments and in the completion of this dissertation. It was also a great opportunity to work twice as her teaching assistant and participate in her 2008 panel at the AAA conference. Her influence on my understanding of the anthropology of human rights and conflicts were critical as well. I also appreciate Andrew Orta's insightful and serious questions about the anthropology of Christianity and nationalism. Alas, I have been very slow to learn from his suggestions, but thanks to his critical comments on my project, I was able to approach Christian conversion and missionary encounters through individual narratives and subjectivity transformation. My project would have not developed with sufficient historical depth without Kenneth Wells' special insights and critical discussions about nationalism and Christianity in Korean history. To him in particular I owe all of my historical understanding of the relationship between self-constructed Korean nationalism and Christianity. Last but not least, I want to express my thanks to Chung Byung-ho, who introduced me to anthropology and North Korean migrant issues as an MA student at Hanyang University. His tireless endeavors and passionate practice in academia and society have always inspired and motivated me to combine theory and practice for public anthropology.

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CHAPTER 1

NORTH KOREAN SUBJECTIVITIES IN A CHANGING WORLD

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of North Korean migrants' Christian encounters with the transnational South Korean evangelical church in both China and South Korea. Since the mid-1990s when a famine took at least one million North Korean lives, in desperate search of food, people crossed the Tumen River, a natural border between China and North Korea. It is via this area that escalating numbers of migrants risk their lives to make their way to South Korea in search of a "better life" (Yoon Y-s. 2003; Suh J-j. 2002; Chung B-h. 2009). Statistics show that a startling 80–90 percent of North Korean migrants identify themselves as Christian when they arrive in South Korea and around 70 percent of them continue to rely on church services for support after they arrive (Jeon W-t. 2007). The church then emerges as a primary "contact zone" (Pratt 1992) in which North Korean migrants are incorporated into Korean Christian values and systems by interacting with established Christians in their transnational lives and migration.

This study examines what Christian conversion means to both the migrants and their southern counterparts. North Korean conversion entails both personal and national salvation not in the after world, but rather in this-worldly life and more precisely in the South Korean evangelical vision of a Christianized reunified nation. My ethnography sheds light on the ways in which the migrants come to be born again as "the chosen" for national and global evangelization. They are moving from the North, a land with "no Holy Spirit," to the South, the "Canaan" where there seems to be "no suffering" in politico-religious terms. More precisely, with a historical and anthropological perspective,

this study stresses that while in the past “defectors” from the North were celebrated as national heroes and heroines by the authoritarian regimes that took an anticommunist line (1960s–1980s), today it is only within the logic of conversion and the space of the church that these migrants are empowered to criticize North Korea. Indeed, the churches rely on them as an attempt to revive their own hegemonic position in South Korean politics and to help envision an anticommunist-Christianized unified Korea. I argue that thus their conversion to Christianity is a cultural project with considerable political and ideological hues that reveal the key characteristics of South Korean anticommunist evangelicalism.

This ethnography comes to life in the era in which the inter-Korean relationship has been so normalized that anticommunism seems to have become a bygone ideology of former authoritarian regimes (Kim S. 2006; Cumings 2007). Since a historical summit meeting between South Korean President Kim Dae Jung and North Korean Leader Kim Jong Il in 2000, the North-South Korean relationship has been so normalized that people came to imagine national reunification as somehow realistic. The Sunshine Policy of Kim Dae Jung's regime accelerated humanitarian aid for North Korean famine relief, economic investments, and various cultural exchanges with the North. Yet the U.S.-North Korea military tension and the world's economic recession have facilitated the South Korean evangelical church's holding ground as the center of South Korea's right-wing movement (Ryu D-y. 2009).

In this historical predicament, the number of North Korean migrants who arrive in South Korea by way of China continues to increase at a rapid pace. They are no longer expected to serve for anticommunist propaganda maneuvers, but rather are depicted as North Korean famine and human rights victims or exemplary northerners at the forefront

of South Korean reunification plans. Second only to the state, South Korean evangelical churches provide various services to ease the migrants' assimilation into the South Korean capitalist system. My project pays particular attention to such evangelical efforts as a cultural project of making new national converts—North Korean Christians who will in turn become agents of national (i.e., North and South) evangelization. I approach the Cold War legacy and the politics of global Christianity through the personal trajectories of North Korean migrants. By focusing on the re-subjectification projects of individual migrants, I am able to demonstrate the ambiguity and the contested process of Christian conversion.

Preceding literatures, published mostly in Korean, address the concerns of both governmental and civil support systems for the migrants and the ways in which the migrants struggle to adjust to their new society (e.g., Choo H-y. 2006; Chung B-h. eds., 2006; Chung B-h. 2004, 2009; Jeon W-t. 2000, 2007; Kang J-w. 2006; Kim Y-s. 2004; Kim Y-y. 2009; Lankov 2006; Suh J-j. 2002; Yoon I-j. 2007; Yoon Y-s. 2002). Among the previous works, anthropological ones have found that the difficulties the migrants face in the adjustment process in the South stem intimately from a larger problem—South Korean ethnocentric nationalism. For instance, North Korean migrants are in general “ethnicized” (Choo H-y. 2006) as second class citizens, as has been similarly observed between West and East Germans in Germany; are socially and biologically “stigmatized” (Chung B-h. 2000); and viewed as “cultural inferiors” (Kim Y-y. 2009) and often discriminated against in schools and the job market in the South. In the meantime, it is critical to realize that the interactions between South and North Koreans are more dynamic than is portrayed in the literature that posits them as principally victims. Kim

Yoon-young's dissertation (2009) examines the ways in which the migrants either strategically conceal or expose their North Korean identities for gaining benefits or justifying the receipt of such benefits. The South Korean donor and North Korean receiver relationship is reversed in accounts for example that report "You got paid thanks to us" (Kim Y-y. 2009: 247-258). These previous works acknowledge that the migrants' Christian experiences and reliance on church services are all significant throughout their life trajectories. However, they tend to consider Christianity or religious matters at large as merely incidental or side issues for migrants. When the church is mentioned, most often it is in instrumental terms: namely the services the church does or should provide.

This dissertation regards the church as the primary intra-ethnic "contact zone," which Mary Louise Pratt defines as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (1992:4). I argue that religion serves as a window through which we can better understand how the complex ideological, political, and cultural tensions (i.e., nationalism, imperialism, freedom, human rights, and etc.) all meet in the reconfiguration of the migrants' identities. More precisely, for the North Korean conversion as a project, this study asserts that the evangelical church, in concert with international anticommunist and North Korean human rights advocates, renders North Korean migrants as "freed" from the communist regime, and "revives" their religiosity by replacing *Kimilsung-ism* (the ideology of Kim Il-sung, or *Juche* North Korean national ruling philosophy) with South Korean Christianity.

In addition to the concept of contact zone, I employ Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "market" and Dorothy Holland et al.'s "figured world" to better contextualize the

conversion project. To avoid any unnecessary confusion, I want to distinguish my use of market from the religious market theory, since the latter refers to the competition among different religions and denominations, and a person's rational choice of their own religion as commodity (see Iannaccone 1991). Instead, I use “market” as a metaphor for what Bourdieu calls the “field of power (politics)”¹ in an attempt to better understand the competing investments between the evangelical church and what it calls “leftist” regimes (i.e., Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun 1998–2007) in envisioning a national future—a reunified nation. In light of this “imagined” reunification, I use “figured world” (Holland et al. 1998) to discuss migrants’ identity reconfiguration in relation to this imagined reunified nation with the. A figured world is defined as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al. 1998:52). In the logic of conversion, the migrant converts are projected to be “the chosen” to save the North and revive Korean Christianity “as if” they are already in a reunified nation.

Accordingly, North Korean conversion is dynamic and saturated in meaning in the context of the fashioning of new national subject. My ethnographic data highlight that the migrant conversion is a veritable contest over what constitutes “true” or authentic Christianity and what Korean-ness should look like in a transforming East Asia.

Interestingly, some migrants proclaim South Korean “selfish” evangelical practices and

¹ As for the notion of a field, in an interview with L. D. Wacquant, Bourdieu defines a field as “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation in the structure of the distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relations to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)” (Wacquant 1989:39).

claim for themselves a leadership role in “Korean” religious revival by evoking their “Christian passage,” namely biblically inspired narratives of their escape from the North to the South.

This chapter proceeds as follows: first, I review the main theoretical concerns in the discussion of conversion as a cultural passage and project. Second, I discuss North and South Korean subjects, arguing that these two cultural “dispositions,” in the Bourdieuan sense, have been constructed in a logic of mirrored distinction (i.e., from one another). In the main body of the chapter, I discuss the ways in which North Korean-ness has been shaped by state policies over time. This section aims to provide necessary background for further understanding the meaning of the church’s interventions in these matters. Finally I introduce and summarize the remaining chapters.

CONVERSION PASSAGE AND PROJECT

This ethnography examines North Korean conversion to Christianity as a cultural passage and project rather than a personal and private transformation (see Austin-Broos 2003; Hefner 1993 and cf. Nock 1933). It is not merely a radical shift of consciousness and soul of the individual by completely denying her/his past background, but rather a series of more complex tensions and changes that accompany the migrants’ physical relocation from the North and internal transformation from Juche or *Kimilsung-ism*, to that of a God’s warriors for Christianization of the Korean (unified) nation. Conversion intertwined with capitalist citizen making is unthinkable without considering the ways in which churches engineer and mediate the conversion process.

In most societies, it is not surprising to see previously unreligious people take on

a new faith or convert from from one religion to another. Robert Hefner illuminates conversion as being “influenced by a larger interplay of identity, politics, and morality” (1993: 4). Throughout this dissertation, I shall consider structural conditions that push and pull the migrants into the terrain of religion. My ethnography asserts that their conversion should not be considered as merely a matter of a liberal individual’s ontological transformation without serious consideration of both institutional interventions (i.e., missionary networks) and particular geopolitical conditions (i.e., the Cold War, famine, and globalization).

When Alexander Solzhenitsyn was able to make his speech at the Nobel Banquet in 1974, he depicted himself as a writer “from a land without liberty.”² At the peak of the Cold War period, refugees or exiles from Soviet Russia, East Germany, Vietnam and Cuba tended to appreciate “freedom” in their new liberal host societies. In comparison to these earlier cases of antisocialist dissidents, my research subject, the Christian conversion of recent North Korean migrants from “the world’s most closed socialist country” rings odd or even ironic. Why, people ask, would former socialist subjects “choose” the constraints of “conservative” Christianity in the midst of their newfound freedoms? Longstanding western models of modernity most often posit an individual’s submission and devotion to religion as something far from modern and liberal life/society and closer to either “traditional” or non-western societies (van der Veer 1996).

This ethnography of North Korean conversion therefore rests on a large number of anthropological literatures on modernity and religion, and considers it in the Cold War context. First, the relationship between nationalism and religion in concert with the state-

² "Alexander Solzhenitsyn - Banquet Speech." Nobelprize.org. 23 Jun 2010
http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-speech74-e.html

church relationship has been discussed at length in anthropological literature. Despite a logical tension between bounded nationalism and transcendent religion, the two mutually rely on one another in the practice of building a modern nation-state and the kingdom of God in different ways in different places (Dirks 2001; van der Veer ed. 1996; van der Veer & Lehmann 1999). Second, and similarly, the secularization theory discussing the relationship between modernity and religion has also been severely criticized (Casanova 1994; Hefner ed. 1993; Keane 2007). Secular modernity in socialism, however, has long been considered as irreconcilable with and antagonistic toward religion. The resurgence of religion after socialism has thus drawn scholarly attention to Christianity, with regard to how Christianity becomes a beacon of democracy, freedom, human rights, and thus universal “truth” (see Hann ed. 2006; Rogers 2005; Steinberg & Wanner eds. 2008; Wanner 2007; Yang 2008).

It is important to study conversion as a joint process and product of the aspirations of individuals and Christian institutions (i.e., churches and missionaries). The history of Christianity is full of tales of individual conversion, through either God’s calling or the convert’s “free will.” Without a consideration of power relations, however, this liberal form of conversion is inevitably suspicious. Scholars of Christian conversion thus consider the particularities of the colonial and post-colonial context, in which Christianity itself has been perceived as a barometer of civilization and modernization in the face of western expansion (Appadurai 1996; Asad 1993; Burdick 1993; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, 2003; Martin 2002; Meyer and Pels et al. 2003; Orta 2004; Pels 1997, 1999; Ong 2003). Beyond the former western missionaries, Korean Christianity is no longer a localized foreign religion. After the United States, South Korea is the largest missionary

sending country (see Chapter 2). However there are many questions that remain unexplored regarding Korean Christianity in the global context. My project attempts to examine the Christian encounters of North Korean migrants in the transnational expansion of South Korean churches. In particular, I maintain that conversion is a specific citizen-subject making project in a particular South Korean vision of the Kingdom of God.

My study reveals that North Korean migrants struggle to rationalize such notions as freedom, liberty, love, self, sense of belonging, sincerity, creationism, nation-state, and others that Christianity introduces and guides them to embrace. However their conversions are not that easy, and migrants' previous perceptions are not so easily cast aside. For example, some adult migrants seem to have assumed that “free” education, “free” food distribution, and “free” medical care would be guaranteed in the South, similar to what the North Korean socialist system provided before its economy collapsed. Similarly, it is a slow process for them to understand the relationship between individual/self and society/nation in South Korean ways. While South Koreans tend to feel ashamed to depend on public health care, some North Korean migrants seem to value a full healthcare service as a natural state service.³ In this regard, my ethnography observes the Freedom School, a mega-church-run training program for the migrants, in which those norms attributed to being a “productive” citizen—such as self-management, self-discipline, and self-development—are emphasized as Protestant ethics as opposed to

³ Obviously I should not generalize this point for all migrants. I observed that the majority of migrants suffer chronic health problems and need full coverage national insurance. According to the South Korean national insurance policy, if a migrant is employed as a full-time worker, her/his insurance is changed to a co-payment one. Those who need special and expensive medical treatment try to maintain a part-time job in order to keep the full coverage national insurance benefit. Some free medical services provided by mega-churches during Sundays and beyond for the poor and old people are also critical for North Korean migrants.

“dependent” and submissive North Korean dispositions. My ethnography stresses the ways in which the South Korean churches conflate the processes of Christian conversion with the fashioning of “inferior” North Koreans into “superior” South Korean people in a “superior” social system.

In church settings and conversion processes, established South Korean church hierarchy, the matter of spiritual pureness, specific ritual forms, and economic status, all perpetuate the imbalance of North and South Korean relations. Nonetheless, North Korean migrants keep relying on churches for various reasons. Why? The answers vary, but some seem to attribute a church membership as being like (North Korean) Party membership, allowing for special treatment like that enjoyed by their Labor Party cadres in the North (Chung B-h.2009). Others seek a better social network for better career building; and still others fulfill spiritual thirst in place of a disenchanted Juche ideology. Other reasons may be similar to those that can be found in South Korea and around the world. I argue that the question of North Korean conversion brings us to a larger query: what would be the limits and potentials of Christianity for the migrants’ new lives in the South, and further, for the “future” reunification process? I begin by providing a brief historical review of human subject making in the context of the divided Koreas, Christianity, and nation-state building.

MAKING AND TRANSCENDING NORTH/SOUTH KOREAN SUBJECTS: (ANTI-) COMMUNISM AND CONVERSION

As I elaborate below, North Korean subjectivities have been shaped in accordance with South Korean power relations. Their identities have been and are always projected

in South Korean practices and discourses. National division is not merely a matter of geographical partition. Rather it separated families, broke kinship ties, led to the creation of enemies, and serves to constantly distinguish the people in the two states. The socio-historical context of my dissertation is a very large one: namely the project of politico-religious differentiation entailed in both South Korean and North Korean subject making. This differentiation, however, has stood—if ironically—alongside the shared insistence of Korean ethnic homogeneity (Shin G-w. 2006; Lee S.-j 2006; Cumings 2007). For South Korea, the human project has been one with Christian humanist hues and always defined against the logic of North Korea’s “secular” socialist subjects. My aim here is not to establish the epistemological truths of these subject projects but to appreciate them as important cultural projects. For North Korea in turn the project has been one of defining a subject against the Western/American-inflected subject.

Interestingly, the religious and secular distinction frame serves both to crystallize how each Korea has followed different trajectories, and to discover how North-South ideological opposition has been arbitrary and absurd. Anticommunism in the South and anti-imperialism in the North are equally religious. Moreover, my North Korean informants are surprised at the fact that Christian elements and the church system are more similar to each other and not that different from the ways of North Korean *Kimilsung-ism* and social management system. Despite their claims of cultural similarities and differences between the two societies, it is striking that anything but food culture from the North is degraded and suspected as inauthentic among the North-South Korean interactions in church settings. In the meantime, as I maintain in this work, North Korean converts challenge and indirectly criticize South Korean religiosity as

materialistic and individualistic. I provide the following subsections as an attempt to situate this new contest as it is produced through micro interactions between South and North Koreans in the division projects that each state regime has perpetuated for more than half a century.

“I hate communists!”: Church and Anticommunism in the South

In this section, I provide a personal reflexive story along with a brief review of South Korean history in order to articulate the ways in which the prevailing cultural logic of anticommunist spirit has been constructed and contested by the interactions between state and church powers.

I remember myself as a child in school, drawing anticommunist posters every year. This activity took place in the name of an “anticommunist poster contest” to which we were all required to submit a poster. Some talented children or those who were the children of “good” parents received awards and the rest were displayed on the school walls for several days. The posters represented how we thought our enemies and their land looked like. The dominant image was the one in which “innocent” North Korean people were always suffering from chronic hunger and labor exploitation by red-skinned monsters with guns and tanks. In the northern part of Korea, a giant fat pig (an effigy of Kim Il Sung) and his brutal wolf soldiers were oppressing humans whom we should rescue by destroying the inhuman demons. Meanwhile, South Korea was a prideful land of normal Koreans being “protected by God, Long Live our country!” as written in the national anthem which aired every morning and evening. All the vehicles and pedestrians on the street would stop and face towards wherever there was a national flag.

While the war-time stories I begged my mother to tell me for a school assignment made me cry, I already submitted myself to being ready to “smash communists.” I was only six or seven years old, but we were encouraged to adopt this attitude by a national “model child,” Lee Seung-bok. He became the youngest anticommunist martyr who was reportedly murdered by North Korean commandos in 1968. I was taught that his mouth was torn to shreds as he shouted “I hate communists!” My school had his statue, which was also in front of the Lee Seung-bok Anticommunism Memorial that every major city has in South Korea. I have never forgotten the young boy’s statue, a still motion of walking with one clenched fist held up to the sky evoking in us a decisive and merciless revenge against the “brutal” communists. In addition to Lee, General Ttory, the main character of a South Korean animated film, was also my hero. While Tarzan only defeated small groups of animal smugglers, Ttory always ridiculed and destroyed the heavily armed communist wolves, and even rescued skinny “innocent” Koreans who were exploited in the deadly mines or prisons under the personified pig dictator. I also appreciated that the U.S. Army unit stationed in my hometown was there to protect us from the omnipresent provocations of the “Reds.”⁴

Today, my childhood anticommunism no longer haunts me. My childhood anticommunism speaks to a long and intensive history of tensions between Korean communists and evangelicals from the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). But their conflicts did not emerge on the surface mainly because all Koreans, except for collaborators, were deadly oppressed by the colonizer (Lee T. 2010: 62). The two forces led various national independence and enlightenment movements against Japan. It wasn’t

⁴ My unwavering belief lasted until I happened to watch a documentary film videotaped by foreign reporters during the 1980 Kwangju Massacre that took hundreds of civilians. The then president Chŏn Tu-hwan had taken office through a militant coup d’état.

until shortly after the liberation that there emerged large scale antagonistic clashes between the two, as Korea was divided into two states by the big powers. Between 1945 and 1953, more than one million people (11 to 15 percent of the northern population) migrated to the South, including 35 to 40 percent of the Protestant population in the North (Kang I-c. 2007, recited from Lee T. 2010: 65). Evangelicals revenged communists brutally. Besides the War, tens of thousands of people were slaughtered on Cheju Island in April 1948, in Yösu in October 1948, in Sinch'ön in October 1950,⁵ and etc., by the Northwest or Söbuk Youth, an anticommunism organization formed in the Seoul YMCA under evangelical leadership, the South Korean Army force, and backed by the United States Army Military Government (USAMGIK) (Lee T. 2010: 66~69).

The national division and the following Korean War that Samuel Kim asserts “[f]or both Koreas ... initiated a decisive shift in identity politics from the competition of multiple identities to the dominance of the Cold War identity,” which, he continues while mentioning the United States’ responsibility in the War, “in turn gave birth to an American strategic culture that thrived on a Manichaeian vision of global bipolarity and the omnipresent communist threat” (2006: 3). The Cold War identity in the South was conflated with Christian nationalism which had already been playing a foundational role in Korean nationalism since the late 19th century and its “self-reconstruction tradition” (Wells 1990) influenced the state-led post-war national restoration movements.⁶ Different

⁵ As Timothy Lee briefly points out in his book, the Sinchön massacre receives popular attention thanks to Hwang Sögyöng (Hwang Sok-yong)’s novel *Sonnim* (The Guest) in which Hwang indicates that communism and Christianity are all merely guests—foreign elements disturbing a host family (i.e., the Korean nation). In light of the term *sonnim* that used to be a figurative expression for smallpox caused by a ghost possession in local folk religion (i.e., shamanism), the guests are also seen as ghosts in need of a local healing ritual to make it leave the patient’s body, the Korean peninsula (see Chapter 2).

⁶ There is a debate among scholars working on the modern history of Christianity in Korea. Not all but most Korean scholars tend to emphasize Christian leaders’ as well as laypersons’ nationalist anti-Japanese movements, while foreign experts are likely to highlight that such interpretation is itself nationalist. Instead

from a western model of modernity in which state-church separation has been assumed, South Korea was founded on relatively large scale evangelical leadership. Syngman Rhee (Yi Sŭngman), a Methodist church elder, served as the first president of South Korea and was supported by the United States. Over 39 percent of the high ranking officials in his administration were Protestant, compared to 0.6 percent of the population in 1945 (see Yi M-y. 2006; Lee T. 2010; Kang I-c. 2007; Ryu 2009 for more discussion about the relationship between the Rhee regime and Protestantism).

As the Korean peninsula remains at war, anticommunism serves as a stand-in for searching out the “enemy” within “us.” Soo-Jung Lee articulates that “In the case of South Korea, one’s ideology was one of the primary criteria for inclusion/exclusion” (2006:11). With little exception, once labeled as *chwaik* (“leftist”) which is identical to the notion of *ppalgaeng-i* (“Red”), s/her deserved death and her/his family members were socially discriminated against and legally disadvantaged according to the guilt-by-association system. The system was officially abolished in 1980 yet persisted for much longer in certain sectors. As the twentieth century observed some of the bloodiest genocides in human history, the “Reds” were not considered to be humans, but devils deserving extinction in the southern part of Korea (Kang I.-d. 2009).

By the late 1980s in South Korea, Protestants and war refugees from the North had become the driving force behind building new churches out of the ashes throughout the post-war “economy first” policy of the militant regimes (Generals Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan). At the peak of the intensive modernization period in the 1960s and 1970s, the church population explosively grew from about 500,000 in 1950 to 623,072 in

they shed light on a strong evangelical tendency and theology influenced by American missionaries who persisted in the logic of state-religion separation, and ended up collaborating with rather than resisting the colonizers (see Ryu 2008, 2009; Lee T. 2010; Lee T. et al. 2006; Wells 1990; Park 2003).

1960, with a 24.6 percent increase, and to 3,192,621 in 1970, a 412.4 percent increase (Kim B-s. 2006: 310). More than 50 percent and 20 percent increases per five to ten years continued into the early 1990s. People went to church for various reasons amid rapid social changes. But it is the prosperity theology that came into the center of Korean evangelicalism and spread like wildfire in the context of post-war South Korea. In churches, pastors preached that they deserved this-worldly happiness by achieving physical health and economic success, and competed to have the largest church building. Byung-suh Kim argues, “The development psychology, along with industrialization, brought about a ‘bigness syndrome’: the size of an institution was understood as a measure of success” (Kim B-s. 2006: 323).

As a consequence, whether it was intended or not, the vast majority of evangelical church leadership and followers were likely to be collaborative and active in the “economy first” policy of the militant regimes. The way that the church supported the political dictatorship was simple, at least in my experience. That is, all I needed to fully focus on in church was Jesus Christ as my savior. The Church never told me of Lee Seung-bok’s anticommunist spirit, but taught me songs and dances followed by candies every Sunday. The founders of mega-churches rarely articulated anticommunism as a main topic in their sermons.⁷ Anticommunism appeared otherwise, in the distinct tones of Biblical language in which “it was God who did not allow the northern communists to conquer this land during the war,” and Germany and Japan were ultimately defeated

⁷ A personal conversation in the summer of 2007 with Kenneth Wells, a professor of the history of Korean Christianity. In particular, he pointed out that Han Kyung-jik, a founder of Yŏngrak Presbyterian Church (the world’s largest Presbyterian church), has rarely blamed the North Korean regime in the early post-War era. Pastor Han was a key organizer of the Socialist Christianity Party founded in the North after the liberation, but soon his party was dismissed as a result of a series of violent clashes with socialists in the North after which pastor Han had to migrate southward.

because God was not with them (Han K-j. 1987: 27). The role of the church as an anticommunist bulwark was instrumental for militant dictators in achieving the Miracle on the Han River, a metonym for South Korean economic growth by the 1980s. Church and state has hardly been separated. Rather they have collaborated and relied on one another in post-war South Korea. In this light, it is problematic to seek a root cause for the rise of Korean Christianity without considering how this local level of the Cold War aura persisted in Korea. It is also significant to note that it was progressive churches and ministers who provided shelter for political dissidents, lead civil and unification movements, and thus fought authoritarian regimes. However, while their sacrificial efforts are appreciated in scholarly works and mass media, the majority of South Korean evangelicals, who occupied more than 90 percent of the whole Protestant population, were not moved by such faith-based social practices for justice. Instead, they were mobilized to bring more people to their churches, or to go abroad for world missionizing.

Thanks to the series of vigorous social movements throughout the 1980s, South Koreans acquired voting rights to elect their president in 1986, and moved on to the unification movement, largely led by the college student unions and progressive religious leaders. Meanwhile, the consecutive collapses of former socialist countries triggered a feeling of victory over the existing communism including the North Korean regime, while such radical changes perplexed progressive nationalists. Importantly, the South Korean state government no longer took their half-century long anticommunist stance as strong as in the past decades, even though the National Security Law, a brutal means of anticommunism, is still alive. Nevertheless, such drastic geopolitical transformation mobilized the South Korean government to normalize its relationship with the North

Korean regime. In the past ten years when two former dissidents Kim Dae Jung (1998–2002) and Roh Moo Hyun (2003–2007) took office consecutively, the inter-Korean relations were so normalized that people imagined the reunification of the two Koreas more realistically.

At this historical juncture, it is evangelical churches that stand for anticommunism as a claimed national identity, and even requested that the then-U.S. Bush administration destroy the “evil” Kim Jong Il regime. At the same time, they enthusiastically brought North Korean migrants from the Sino-North Korean border area and celebrated them as evidence of God’s calling for a Christianized reunified nation. In other words, since the collapse of former communist countries and the 1990s’ devastating North Korean famine, Korean evangelicals have felt more empowered and convinced of God’s blessing on South Korea versus the cursed North Korea. They moved to brand the Kim and Roh regimes as “red” or “leftist” for having tried to abolish the National Security Law. The evangelical churches organized street protests, huge prayer meetings for national salvation, and tried to strengthen their influence on politics. They put forth enormous effort to elect the current president, Lee Myung-bak, as he is an elder of one of the mega-churches.

In Jose Casanova's (1990) terms, the church as a public religious institution can be observed in other countries of the west and Mid-east Asia. As previously mentioned, Protestant politicians held power from the beginning of South Korean history under the auspices of the U.S. government. Nevertheless, the political involvement of the South Korean church is unique. They rationalize irrational anticommunism through biblical

language, ritual, and the creation of a projected world in light of “vision.” This religious rhetoric has been a driving force in making Christian subjects.

The Cold War sentiment and Korean evangelical ritual languages, so complicatedly and uncannily interwoven, tend to constantly haunt Korean society. Similar to some of the ideas expressed in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and in Daphne Berdahl’s *Where the World Ends* (1999) regarding the Ossi and Wessi differentiation in Germany, an ideologically inflicted “Manichaeic vision”—“good” South Korea vs. “evil” North Korea—became a veritable cultural system: a in both wealth and spirituality vs. poor and idolatrous; free individuals vs. militant collectives; peaceful/humanitarian vs. aggressive/inhuman; and so on. This binary opposition between the North and the South continues to serve as a conceptual framework for apprehending North Korean migrants in the South.

“We are happy!”: “Man-centric Heaven on Earth” in the North

Both states have engineered a shared myth of ethnic homogeneity for evoking legitimacy in light of a future reunification. However for the migrants, South Korea is a society where “you need money, which guarantees your social status,” echoed a young migrant in his late twenties. In some migrants’ understanding of South Korea, wealth is a barometer of an individual’s capability. Nonetheless in the North, immediately following the liberation from Japanese occupation, material well-being was equally emphasized as a supreme national task. The “Great Supreme Leader” Kim Il Sung promised three meals a day with a bowl of white rice and a beef or other meat soup, or *i pap e koki kuk*, which was only enjoyed by the ruling *yangban* (nobility) class in the feudal times or by the

Japanese colonizers and collaborators. Juche (self-reliance) ideology was developed as its own ruling philosophy, its own type of anti-imperial nationalist socialism (*Urisik sahoejuŭi*) proclaiming “Let’s live on our own way!” (see Cumings 1991, 2004).

This section portrays North Korean society with limits. North Korea exists in extremely bipolarized narratives and images, which constitutes the following part. B. R. Myers in his recent book, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans see themselves—And why it matters* (2010), argues that North Korea’s dominant ideology has been misinterpreted through terms like communist or Stalinist, Confucian patriarchy, and self-reliance. He clearly introduces readers to the North Korean worldview: “The Korean people are too pure blooded, and therefore too virtuous, to survive in this evil world without a great parental leader. ... [T]he country has always been, at the very least, ideologically closer to America’s adversaries in World War II than to communist China and Eastern Europe” (Myers 2010:15-16). While appreciating his effort to reframe North Korea in the theme of race, I have to say that the North Korean worldview he discovers is by no means timeless and homogeneous. Unfortunately, however, there has been no single anthropological research done by either insiders or outsiders in North Korea. North Korean migrant witnesses draw media attention and seem to slowly unveil “the most closed” society. The Beijing bureau chief of the Los Angeles Times, Barbara Demick, has recently published *Nothing to Envy* (2009), a groundbreaking work. Based on both archive research and the accounts of the migrants who mainly came from Ch’ŏngjin (Chongjin), the capital of the North Hamkyŏng Province in North Korea, Demick tells us the stories of people’s daily lives, struggling in the face of famine and abrupt social changes in the North. Other scholars and journalists are most often render North Korea

by paying attention to two key things—the Kim family (in particular Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il) and Juche ideology.

Juche ideology can also be called either Juche or Juche Idea, as a core component of *Kimilsungism*, the North Korean official system. Kim Il-sung declared Juche as the North Korean form of socialism; different from the forms used by the Soviet Union and China. These two socialist countries were claiming the authenticity of their socialist systems over one another since the late 1950s. Kim Il Sung emphasized three principles to clarify what Juche means: “independence in politics” (*chaju*), “self-sustenance in the economy” (*charip*), and “self-defense in national defense” (*chawi*).

As the Juche principle shows, the notion is likely rooted in Christian nationalist movements in the 1920s and 1930s (Wells 1990: 163). It is undeniable that Kim Il Sung, celebrated as the brilliant creator of the Juche, was influenced by Christianity. He was raised in a very sincere Christian family; key Christian nationalists joined with him to found North Korea; and he respected Rev. Son Jung Doh as a great benefactor throughout his lifetime. In his autobiography *With the Century* (1993), he was impressed with the anti-Japanese Christian movements (see Kim I-s. 1993, Vol. 3.1 & Vol. 4.1).

Under the banner of “our own way!” anti-imperialism in general and anti-Americanism in particular are intrinsically blended in the concept of Juche. Recorded in a 1999 video by a non-governmental relief agency at work in North Korea, a six or seven year old boy was asked to say something to South Korean students. In a decisive voice he speaks as if having been prepped: “What I just wanted to say to South Korean friends (*Namjosŏn dongmu-dŭl*) is that let us kick imperial Yankees out of our country as soon as

possible and study and play together.”⁸ At the heart of this young boy’s formulaic account is a strong sense of blood purity among ethnic Koreans and North Korean national pride. North Koreans in North Korea “officially” believe that their country is a true independent state which has never been afraid of, but rather always stands against “imperial” America.

While in South Korea Christianity and American forms of modernity jointly took the lead in state building, an opposite yet mirror process took place in the North. As demonstrated earlier, while numerous people accused as “leftists” were brutally executed in the South, Christian advocates were excluded by the socialist revolution, which began and gained popularity with land reform. It is worthwhile recalling that Christians numbered about 2.1 percent in the northern part in 1945 while their southern counterparts numbered only 0.6 percent. Thanks to the 1907 Great Revival that American missionaries proudly presented as at the time the largest revival movement in Asia, Pyongyang was once called the Jerusalem of East Asia.

It was a great attempt on behalf of the Protestant leadership that organized the Christian Socialist Democratic Party (*Kidokkyo Sahoe Minjudang*). The party was soon forcibly dismissed as they were denied participation in a nationwide election which had been scheduled on a Sunday. Since then, for example, Rev. Han Kyōngjik (Han Kyung-Chik), one of the leaders of the party, had to migrate south of the 38th parallel and later established the Yongrak Presbyterian Church, the world's largest Presbyterian congregation. Those who did not migrate to the south were all allegedly executed, sent to concentration camps, or born again as socialist revolutionary subjects. According to an

⁸ Cited from a film videotaped in 1999 and edited in 2000 by Okedongmu Children Korea, a non-government organization working for North Korean children’s famine relief. My translation. I worked as a research staff member for this organization at the time.

official record announced by the Korean Church Martyrs Missionary Association (KCMMA) in 2001, about 90 percent of Protestant martyrs (191 by 2001) were murdered by communists between 1945 and 1953 (see Kang I.-c. 2007).

With an extraordinary atrocity having taken place under the banner of “our own way,” Juche ideology also claims to be a man-centric philosophy different from the materialistic Marxism:

“Marxist philosophy raised, as its major task, the clarification of the essence of the material world and the general law of its motion, whereas the Juche philosophy has raised, as its important task, the elucidation of *man’s essential characteristics* and the law of social movement, man’s movement. Therefore, the Juche philosophy is an original philosophy which is fundamentally different from the preceding philosophy in its task and principles” (Kim J.-i. 1996: 2, emphasis added).

The infinite entitlement of man as “the best qualified and most powerful being” (Kim J.-i. 1996:2) who can dominate and transform the world is also a model Juche human. And the “man’s movement” in the Korean modern historical context can be characterized as also anti-imperial self-reliant nation-state building. The North Korean Juche human is an individual who serves national sovereignty, which is represented by the Labor Party. The North Korean Constitution article 63 manifests “In the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea the rights and duties of citizens are based on the collectivist principle, ‘One for all and all for one’.” In order to maintain their “own” hegemonic spirit of men-centric, anti-imperial collective self, ideology education for all people becomes imperative. Scholars in political science and international relations have wondered how the weakest of the former socialist countries have survived, and how the weakest of the Six Party members (US, Russia, China, Japan, North and South Korea) seems to

dominate the relationship (see Kim S. 2006). For the Juche citizen-subjects, it is ideology itself that is a force:

“The most serious lesson of the collapse of socialism in several countries is that the corruption of socialism begins with ideological corruption, and that a breakdown on the ideological front results in the crumbling of all socialism's fronts and ends in the total ruin of socialism” (Kim J.-i. 1995).

It is so-called “ideology education (*sasang haksŭp*)” that is required of all people in the North. Throughout life at schools, workplaces, the small and large organizations the people belong to, North Koreans come to internalize a strong sense of national pride and self-respect. North Korean migrants often testify that they considered themselves as extended family cared for by Father Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il, and because of their unique revolutionary spirit against imperialists (i.e. the U.S. and Japan) their country and people are all admired by foreign countries.

Myung-hee, who was in her mid-30s when we met in 2007, once described the ways that her parents practiced Juche Idea during her church testimonial: “My parents were really serious about following the party and the leader comrade [Kim Il Sung]. As they learned, the first thing they did in the morning was clean the portrait of Kim Il Sung on the wall, with what we called ‘sincerity cloth’ which they made themselves with luxurious fabric. While they were doing that, they prayed, ‘Let me live clean today as the great leader Kim Il Sung teaches us’. In schools, they conduct ideology education in order to raise the loyalty of students toward the great leader Kim Il Sung for about thirty minutes before class, including singing songs together.”

Interestingly, I often witnessed that many North Korean migrants are surprised at the fact that there are similarities between the doctrine and operation system of North

Korean and the South Korean Church. For instance, the Ten Commandments of Moses is equivalent to the Ten Point Principle for Solidifying the Party's Monolithic Ideological System. Memorizing key speeches and lessons of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il is like reading the Bible, self criticism like a religious testimonial, and a daily cell meeting not dissimilar from bible studies are just some examples. However they point out that the South Korean church does not call for mutual criticism at the cell meeting, while it is required in North Korea. They say that the mutual criticism system is key machinery that makes people watch others, distrust, and always try to find fault with one another.

My research elaborates the ways in which South and North Korean migrants are surprised, disappointed, depressed, or delighted with one another while encountering unexpected cultural differences and similarities. Yet still the relationship in China and South Korea is asymmetrical, since the southerners think of themselves as care providers, and of their northern counterparts as receivers—a perspective often echoed by northerners. In this light, scholars like Lissa [sp?] Malkki (1995, 1996) observed refugee camps where humanitarian staff often views the subjects of their care as uncivilized, rude, violent, and “not like refugees.” Similar cases have been discovered in the western centric feminist discourse and practices that view non-western females as victim-subjects (Mahmood 2005, and see also Cohen 1989; Messer 1993; Wilson 2003 for anthropological critics on human rights). Christians who work with the migrants often describe the nature of North Korean migrant personality as an embodiment of Juche ideology. They are viewed negatively as being uncivilized and violent, as overly masculine males and relatively docile females, hot tempered, good at lying, and so forth.

In this respect my limited study also entails ethnographic vignettes elaborating the ways in which North Korean migrants have often struggled to behave and speak in ways that their counterparts want to see and hear, and the ways in which their unexpected characteristics such as being humorous, energetic, and independent, surprise their counterparts.

I now examine the ways in which North Korean migrant identities have been heavily shaped by the South Korean state policy toward North Korea. I attempt to show that while the migrants were always perceived as anticommunist emblems in the past, they have been recently depoliticized as “regular citizens.” Ironically, once stripped of their political value, they are but another fallen minority group, and described as socially maladjusted losers in the South (Kim Y-y. 2009).

FROM HEROES TO BURDENS

On February 25, 1983, Lee Woong-pyung defected from North Korea by flying a MIG-19 fighter jet to the South, leaving his entire family behind. The South Korean Chun Doo-hwan regime, that had taken office by coup d'état, took this opportunity to display its political and moral legitimacy over North Korea.⁹ A few months after on a rainy day in April, he cried “*Taehanmin'guk manse!* (Hurrah for South Korea!)” at Yoido Square where there was a welcoming ceremony which was combined with an anticommunist convention, totaling around 2 million people holding umbrellas and pickets proclaiming “Let’s smash communists.”

⁹ Byung-ho Chung addresses “the military regimes in the South, which lacked political legitimacy and publicly displayed the border crossers as proof of their success, while the conservative political groups in the US and Japan used them as proof of their moral superiority to the communist regimes” (2008: 5).

Over twenty years later, North Korean newcomers in the airport hesitate to show their faces, and wear a mask instead. While Lee Woong-pyung held public press interviews, few newcomers allow researchers or reporters to take their pictures or write down their real names or even their ages. They are afraid for their family left in China or North Korea, who might be arrested or even punished to death. Before that can happen, they usually want to try to bring the rest of their family members to South Korea.

While Lee brought an MIG-19 fighter jet and classified secrets that the South Korean regime valued at the time, these newcomers bring nothing but their own bodies and stories of how they have undergone the famine, atrocities, sexual abuses, labor imprisonment, and family separation in North Korea and/or China, which are no longer valuable but unwelcomed by the state. While Lee was awarded 1.2 billion KRW (1.4 million USD) in compensation money to continue his profession with the South Korean Air Force, about 480 times the average annual incomes of South Koreans in 1983, most newcomers today end up having temporary or part-time jobs. More significantly, these newcomers seldom or never tell their Southern counterparts that they are from North Korea, due to the fear of social discrimination.



[Photo 1] (Left) Lee Woong-pyung on April 14, 1983, shortly after defecting from North Korea by flying his MIG-19 jet fighter (source from KTV, Korean Government Broadcasting System). (Right) Female North Koreans with masks are arriving at the Incheon International Airport (source from *Yonhap News*).

For early “heroes” like Lee, however, there is an irony. Lee was celebrated as a national hero and his life was guaranteed by the state, but the rest of his family members left in North Korea were allegedly persecuted. This consequence was perceived as inhumane, selfish, and spiteful by South Korean civilians. This distrustfulness as a bias was also conjoined with a reproach that charged North Koreans with supporting the authoritarian regimes from a standpoint of the progressives (Chung B-h. 2009). These kinds of negative cultural biases persist to the extent that newcomers likely encounter them in South Korea. Meanwhile, the political meanings of “anticommunist national heroes” gradually faded away along with cash compensation awarded by the state.

In other words, it is the state power which has represented the border crossers as national heroes or heroines as part of division politics. It is also the state that began depoliticizing and positioning the newcomers in the South Korean class hierarchy.

With respect to the role of the state in the making of North Korean cultural citizenship, what follows is a brief analytical summary of the changing definitions of the Northerners given by the state. It is important for further discussions of citizenship, as Foucauldian theory reminds us of the need for understanding theories and practices of citizenship as developed by nation-states as a set of political mechanisms controlling and regulating the “level, type, and range of societal membership” (Rocco 2004: 15).

Anticommunist Warriors (1945–1993)

The North and South Korean states have governed their subjects and determined what type of access the individuals and families have to the rights, benefits, and resources the state grants to full citizens. Countless dissidents in both states have been persecuted and their family members and relatives alike had restricted access to the rights and opportunities as citizens through the guilt-by-association systems in the Cold War era.¹⁰

South Korean modern nation building was equivalent to a project of constructing “proper” politico-cultural citizens who were ready to serve and protect “our nation” from communism and communists—“Reds,” and by devoting themselves to the national economic development. Such masculine, militant, and anticommunist norms of good citizenship have been perpetuated as the modality of modern South Korea through division politics, which Soo-jung Lee refers to as “South Korea’s competition with and negation of the legitimacy of North Korea based on the ideology of anticommunism” (2006: 2).

¹⁰ The guilt-by-association system was allegedly officially abolished in the 1980s, but effectively existed in security screening until recently in South Korea. You say this in the text earlier in the chapter – so maybe this FN is unnecessary

The Northerners emerged at the birth of national division¹¹ and have been shaped by this doctrine of anticommunist citizen-subject making. Their physical appearances and the series' of anticommunist propaganda lecturing tours they carried out for the state constructed North Korean stereotypes among South Koreans. In addition, their socio-cultural statuses in South Korea have depended heavily on the government's legal and administrative support system. The state played the role of "a strong cultural and political actor" (Kelleher 2003: 19) in the making of the Northerner subjectivities in South Korea.

In his recent article, Byung-ho Chung (2008) divides the Northerners into six groups according to their social definitions.¹² Among those six definitions, I consider the first three of them as being made into and becoming anticommunist warriors, as follows:

(1) "System selective migrants" (1945–1950): people who fled from the socialist North to the South at the dawn of national division. They were called "Crossers to the South (*walnamin*)," and the village they settled in, in Seoul, was called "Liberation village (*Haebangchon*)."

(2) "War refugees (*pinanmin*)" (1950–1953): approximately 650,000 northerners moved down to the South during the Korean War. They became "synonymous with 'Christians' and 'Anti-communists'" (Chung B-h. 2009: 9).

¹¹ At the same time that Northerners existed, so did their Southern counterparts' social discrimination, which were based on cultural biases that had been present even in the Chosŏn Dynasty period prior to the modern Korea. Historical records show that few bureaucrats from Northern provinces were able to achieve the higher positions that were all occupied by Southerners. See Sun Joo Kim (2009) for more detailed history about that period. The cultural biases of South Koreans against the Northerners in my project, however, are not merely bounded to the region but rather are a modern product constructed by and inflected with the Cold War legacy and class distinction. I will continue discussing this in the current and following chapters. cut the last sentence

¹² Some Korean scholars tend to only consider the Northerners who came to the South after the Korean War, and often divide them into two groups; one being those who came to the South by the 1980s, and the other being those who came to the South since the 1990s (see Kim S. Y. 2009).

These two groups above are the first generation of Northerners and are known as *Silhyangmin*, or separate families. Soo-jung Lee articulates that “*Silhyangmin* have been publicly produced as ‘enunciating subjects’ “who speak for the anticommunist state,” while *Wölbukcha* families, in which one or another member went to the North, have been marginalized and silenced (2006: 4).¹³

(3) “Heroes who returned to the state (*Guisun (Kwisun) yongsa*)” (1962–1993): a small number of defectors from the North who since the early 1960s began receiving special treatment and financial rewards, as the then-militant Park Jung-hee regime set up the Special Relief Act for Patriots and Heroes Who Returned to the State. They were treated similar to the patriots of independence movements, and taken care of by the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs. The amount of the award, *borogeu*m, increased if one brought weapons and valuable information. Before 1993, however, the number of “heroic defectors” was no larger than ten per year, and the financial burden on the government for compensating them was not that heavy.

The images of “heroic defectors” published in the mass media during this period had a great influence on South Koreans visualizing the “poor, starved and oppressed” North Korean stereotypes; namely, they thought that North Korean defectors should wear a shabby military uniform or outdated clothes (Kang J-w. 2006). When they reappeared in public for press conferences or special anticommunist lectures some time after arriving, their physical appearances demonstrated a clear “before and after,” since they dressed in suits. Their bodies were a marker of the “evil” communist North Korea where they were oppressed and starved, and a converted emblem of “modern and superior” South Korea.

¹³ See also Kim Ki-ok (1999, 2004), and Kim Sung-nae (1989, 2001) for more ethnographic discussions on similar issues.

Also, the anticommunist propaganda lecturing tours most defectors had to carry out aimed at South Korean audiences in part contributed to reproducing the “Red complex” and anticommunism. Lee Sang-soo (1992) discovered that the “heroes” coming to the South in the 1960s–70s had lectured, on average, 4,000–8,000 times for years by the early 1990s.

The content of the lectures was how the South Korean militant regime wanted to portray the North Korean socialist regime: namely that they were warmongers, brutal and “evil” Reds, and citizens who were “living on thin gruel” (*Kangnaengijuk*), and deprived of all agency and basic freedoms¹⁴ (Lee S-s. 1992). They performed in the vocabulary and grammar of the “division language” (Jun H-g. 2000).

The format and content of their lectures were largely managed by national security agents. However there were times that they happened to tell or show a “truth” that gave a positive impression about the North while answering questions from audiences. For example, Lee Sang-soo introduced an episode that Mr. M experienced. Mr. M had some of his family members’ color photos. A national security agent took them from him asking “How are there color photos in the North?” But Mr. M was able to keep secret one of his sister’s photos. One day he went to lecture before college students and there was a female student who asked many questions about everyday North Korean life in detail. To aid in answering the questions, he showed his sister’s color photo to the audience. As a result, after the lecture, the agent investigated his house once more and confiscated his last photo.

¹⁴ In such an authoritarian period, the term of human rights (*inkwŏn*) was likely equivalent to that of anti-government pro-democracy movements and thus coerced to mean pro-North Korea in South Korea. Even today, domestic human rights activists working for laborers, homeless people, sexual minorities, immigrant workers and so on often encounter these anticommunist reactions in the field.

Many of these speakers developed a ‘fluency’ in delivering these scripted speeches thousands of times. The false and opposite information that they relayed slowly transformed into a kind of truth and in this way they became agents of creating a false reality which was eventually discovered to be wrong. For example, Mr. Kim who came to the South in 1999 once told me, “I realized that there were some imposters among famous North Korean lecturers. For instance, one man has been saying for years that ‘there is no ancestral worship allowed in North Korea. No other than Kim Il-sung can be worshiped, so if one did such things, his all family would be persecuted,’ things like that. I was perplexed to hear that as an audience with other South Koreans. It was because my family continued to do such traditions every year, and I lived in Pyong-yang. He was lying before me, but I was not able to offend him, because it might hurt our [North Korean] image before South Koreans.”

Nonetheless, what the “heroes” have done became a part of conventional life trajectories that the newcomers tend to follow. First, the so-called anticommunism lectures were, for some “heroes,” their main income source and almost a mandatory national duty to compensate for the support of the South Korean state (*Yonhap News* 2007. 2. 4). Either scheduled by the government or other conservative civil organizations, some ‘famous’ lecturers continued to be invited and paid for the lectures. Second, the format of the testimonies became a specific genre that South Korean audiences became familiar with, and that North Korean border crossers are expected to perform before their audiences.

Settler Kin or Brethren Settlers (1993–1997)

I turn now to the changing definitions and support systems of the government since the 1990s. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the post-Cold War era in world history. Such a historical transformation awakened South Korean people to the fact that the Korean peninsula became the last divided nation. Although some Marxist activists leading social movements for democracy and unification were perplexed by losing a socialist model nation-state, the popular desire for peace in the peninsula transcended the previous concerns about ideological competition with socialism.

The first civilian president after consecutive militant regimes in South Korean history, Kim Young-sam, promoted a unification policy of “peaceful cooperation and reconciliation” with the North Korean regime, human rights and quality of life improvements, humanitarian food aid, and economic cooperation. The North Korean migrant issue was situated within this unification policy, and this administration did not want the migrant issue to disturb the inter-Korean relationship. In a sense, the Kim YS administration’s policy toward the migrants was unstable. In the case of North Korean wood-cutters in Russia who wanted to be exiled to South Korea, but Kim YS denied their request, reflecting his “selective” acceptance policy.

However, as the North Korean economic situation worsened and the country faced a devastating famine, the number of North Korean border crossers in search of food in China increased at a rapid pace. The number of those who came to South Korea by way of China began increasing. While most defectors in the previous decades were from relatively elite groups like government officials, party members, or military officials, the

new migrants were from less privileged social statuses including factory workers, farmers, women, and even young adults, which demonstrated how the North Korean food distribution system collapsed (Chung B-h. 2001). The following are the changing policies for the migrants since the Kim Young-sam administration.

(4) “North Korean brethren who returned to the state (*Guisun dongpo*)” (1993–1997). The Kim Young-sam administration enacted the Act to Protect North Korean Brethren Who Returned to the State in 1993, with which the newcomers became treated as economic refugees, and the government division taking care of them changed from the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs to the Ministry of Health and Society (now the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs). During this time, the government subsidy for their housing and settlement was reduced so that each individual received about 7,000 US dollars for resettlement and about 8,400 US dollars for housing.

The change in supplements implied that the previous Act was established to lure potential defectors as a form of competing with the North. Kim Sang-gyun underscores this aspect of the previous Act prior to 1993 that “has promoted regime and other political propaganda, and its main targets are spies, soldiers from the North and etc. And the services including excessive reward and so on given to them are too much” (1994: 47-48, cited at Yoon Y-s 2001: 291, 11n).

Combined with the change in political climate, the principle of equity in this issue arose. That is, the newcomers came to be supported in their settlement based on the welfare system in which they were equivalent to South Korean low-income citizens (*Yŏngsemin*). However, the term “returned to the state (*Guisun*)” implied the political defection, while the term “*dongpo* (brethren)” had reflected a symbolic victory appealing

to South Koreans—as if “we” South Koreans should welcome with affection our “brethren” who went through difficulties under the “outdated” socialist North. However the reality of this change was harsh to the new “brethren.”

Ambivalence arose as a result of the new definitions (*Guisun*) and the little support that Northerners were given by the government. The new arrivals during this period underwent serious maladjustment problems—unemployment, poverty, and social discrimination. Contrary to their expectations, the “brethren” were no longer “protected” by the state and half of them were unemployed (Chosun 1996.2.7.). In addition to material poverty, culture shock, and psychological loneliness, feelings of guilt impeded their social adjustment process. Moreover, the North Korean famine caused an increase in border crossers in the Sino-North Korean border area and the South Korean government needed to consider a better support system for the newcomers (Chung B-h. 2009, Yoon Y-s. 2001).

Struggling for Definition (1997–Present)

Over the past ten years, the North Korean population in the South has tremendously changed. Above all, the state came to see the issue of North Koreans as part of long-term plans for national reunification. The Ministry of Unification took over the matter from the Ministry of Health and Society. The Kim Dae-jung administration (1998–2002) tried to maintain a balance between the normalization of inter-Korean relations and support systems/programs for the newcomers. Since this thesis gives primary concern to the migrants who have emerged since the mid-to-late 1990s, I will first discuss the definitions and then examine the meanings of the state contact zone.

The first definition is for “Residents who escaped from North Korea (*Bukhan ital joomin*)” (1997–2004): In 1997 the Act for the Protection and Resettlement Support for the Residents Who Escaped from North Korea (hereafter, the Act) was passed. Based on the Act, the Hanawon (House of Unity) was established in January of 1999, as a government settlement center operated by the Ministry of Unification. As such, the South Korean government support system for the newcomers became part of long-term plans for national unification. The Kim Dae-jung administration provided about 36,000 US dollars per each adult for settlement. While the government officially and legally defined them as *Bukhan ital joomin*, *Talbukja* began to be used more often in civil society and mass media. *Talbukja* tends to indicate both those who were in third countries like China and Russia, and those who arrived directly in the South.

“New Settlers (*Saeteomin*)” (2005–present): The Roh Moo-hyun administration tried to neutralize the terminology of the newcomers from the North. A new name “Saeteomin,” which was chosen through a popular contest, means “new settlers.” The government decided on the name change because the term *Talbukja*, that has been most widely used, implied two negative nuances: “Talbuk” implies political escape from the North. The other, “ja,” is a suffix that is from classic Chinese noun translated as “nom” in Korean. “Nom” once meant ordinary people in the pre-modern period, but it became an abusive moniker. For this reason similarly, “*changaeja*,” the disabled, was changed to “*changaein*” since “in” is from “saram,” meaning 'people'.

South Korean conservatives and some North Korean activists working to change the North Korean regime rejected using the new term. Instead they preferred “*talbukja* (escapees)” or “*jayu ijumin* (free migrants)” as their collective identity. In the meantime,

shortly after beginning their new life, considerable numbers of newcomers spent large amounts of their resettlement money to pay off the brokers and to bring the rest of their family members in North Korea or China to South Korea. Many lost their money to swindlers. As a result, the government decided to distribute the settlement money over longer periods of time.

Walnamin, Pinanmin, Silhyangmin, Guisun yongsa, Guisun dongpo, Bukan ital joomin, Talbukja, and Saeteomin are the series of definitions that the South Korean state has used to officially conceptualize North Korean border crossers who settled or want to settle in South Korea. Not merely legal terminologies, these definitions reflect the politics of Korean state nationalisms.

First, this genealogy of conceptualizations about the Northerners shows us the ways in which the political meanings have been potently bound in the making of the Northerners' subjectivity by the state. For decades, they were "enunciating subjects" (Lee S-j's *Silhyangmin* case) serving the anticommunist state. They were "performing" as anticommunist lecturers, performing what the state wanted to tell and show about North Korea.

Accordingly, and second, the different name tags changed over time and reflected the differences in the state material compensations that were essential to the social adjustment of North Koreans. Andrei Lankov asserts that the previous "heroes" could adjust in South Korean society more easily than the current defectors because they came from the North Korean elite (he stresses that this was "inevitable" because of the North Korean Stalinist border control system which allowed zero illegal penetration, and only high-ranking officers could have access to the border area) (Lankov 2006). Immigrant

individual adaptability based on former social experiences and education are considered to be important assets but more significant should be a host country's willingness to accept the assets. In this respect, it is the state that has exerted an enormous impact on the newcomers' success in their initial period of social adjustment in the South.

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH JOURNEY

I carried out ethnographic research in Seoul, South Korea and in a town in the Sino-North Korean border in the Northeast of China from August 2006 to December 2007. I also draw on my previous experiences from 1999 to 2002 when I worked for the NGO, the Center for Cultural Integration, conducting fieldwork in China for a North Korean famine relief project and organizing education programs for young North Korean migrants in the South. This previous experience was very helpful for establishing rapport with North Korean migrants, receiving substantial help from local agents in China, and for gaining a better understanding of the trends over time in North Korean migration and South Korean policy toward the migrants. In this regard, my thesis is a product of both my previous activities and recent dissertation fieldwork.

By 2002, while engaged in activities for developing alternative education programs for young North Korean migrants in South Korea, I became aware of the importance of anthropological approaches for fashioning culturally relativistic programs. Although the number of youth multiplied with the escalating number of newcomers from the North by way of China, there were no specific care programs for young people in the government facility of Hanawon, the primary state-run integration center for newcomers. I participated in establishing and running an education program in this facility and later in

Seoul. At the same period, I co-authored *Bookhaneseo on nae chin-gu* (A friend from North Korea) for South Korean elementary school teachers to use in unification education classes. My co-authors were a South Korean professor of psychology and two North Korean migrants who had been elite writers in the North. This series of activities gave me a chance to witness those cultural differences that both South and North Koreans encounter while interacting with each other. Anthropological approaches, which value “historicity” and “particularity” (Boas 1896[1940]) as a means of understanding culture as a whole, emerge as the best anthropological research practices in organizing activities, influencing policy making, and understanding rapidly transforming trends in the field. The Korean peninsula was entering the post-division era at a rapid pace (Cho H. 2000, Jung 2007).

Until President George W. Bush’s term “axis of evil,” first announced in January 2002, delineating Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as key offenders in the War on Terror, the issue of North Korean migrants (mostly called defectors in the mass media at that point) drew relatively little scholarly attention in the United States and in Korean Studies circles.¹⁵ Even to this day, as Chung (2008) notes, journal articles have largely focused on their desperate living conditions, assigning blame to both the Chinese and North Korean regimes for human rights violations, and suggesting rescue activities without detailed concern for either local specificities or global implications. It was my first year in the department of anthropology at the University of Illinois when the Iraq War began and President Bush continued to spread the notion of an “axis of evil.”

¹⁵ For example, I first presented a short paper about *Hanadul* school, an alternative school for young North Korean migrants in *Hanawon*, active since early 2001, at a special Korean Workshop series on Korean education. At the time, I was not able to finish my presentation because most participants, Korean education specialists from on and off campus, had too many questions about how and why the migrants came to the South, how to live, and etc.

Since this historical juncture, I witnessed that anticommunist discourses and narratives began to emerge among the newly arrived North Korean migrants. I consider this moment a starting point in the formation of a canonical language aimed at the North Korean regime. I will narrate my experience. One day, I accessed a website of an organization that I participated in founding with new North Korean migrants for the purpose of establishing friendships between North and South Koreans. At that time, the website was very unique because we could read North Korean individuals' auto-ethnographic-like stories that gave me a good sense and vivid picture of the ways they lived in the North. The stories somewhat romanticized their lives in the pre-famine North Korea, and even stories of immense suffering—family loss, separation, deaths, and hardship caused by the famine in China and the North—were described as merely the drama of being alive, rather than pinning particular blame on the North Korean state or system. However, when I checked the writings members left on a free bulletin board, there was a dramatic change: the webpage itself was full of anti-North Korean slogans and stories of revenge. The writings of the previous contributors had disappeared and were totally erased, and there was a host of new writers (who I was unfamiliar with) in their place. Since then, some North Korean migrants that I had known began actively cooperating with the Bush administration and South Korean conservative organizations by testifying in North Korean human rights violation cases about labor camps and gulags.

In the summer of 2004, I went to South Korea in order to get a feeling for the sea changes in the field. On the basis of the Center for Cultural Integration (CCI), I explored the general tendency of North Korean migrants and their adjustment processes, in particular those of college-aged young people. Through observing their daily lives at the

workplace or college, I became more interested in the fact that the majority of North Korean migrants tended to rely on church services, religious meetings such as Sunday group Bible study, intensive training programs, and picnics that were somewhat mandatory activities in order to garner a monthly stipend from the church. This phenomenon reminded me of my first fieldwork experience in China in the summer of 2000, when I was able to meet with the refugee children through the church network. At the time, all the secret shelters were run by Korean-Chinese who were trained as missionaries at missionary schools directly or indirectly established and run by South Korean churches or missionary organizations.

When I presented an overview of this research trip at my department Brown Bag series, I was questioned about the implications of the connection between Christianity/Church and North Korean migration. It was at that point that I decided to shift my research focus from young North Korean migrants to the church itself as a contact zone in which North Korean migrants and established South Korean Christians interact with each other. In the meantime, as mentioned above, considering that South Korean Christianity was facing severe criticism in and beyond South Korea, I became more interested in what Christian conversion means to both North Korean migrants and the South Korean church in an era in which reunification seemed to be growing more plausible.

During another summer research trip in 2005, I participated in and observed several training programs run by mega-churches and interviewed both North Korean participants and South Korean Christians in the programs. I chose the Freedom School (FS) as my main ethnographic research site, because I considered it to be a model training

program entailing all the activities that other church programs could only selectively carry out due to their limited budget and manpower. Among organizations that undertake working with and caring for migrants, there is a policy of not admitting outsiders to observe and interview their charges; this is the case so as to protect both the migrant individuals and their family members who remain in North Korea. Similarly, this secrecy extends to the running of their operations: they are not willing to share their practices with other organizations offering similar programs. I was fortunate enough to be granted unlimited access to the FS programs.

From August 2006 to December 2007, I participated in and observed most of the FS programs, including regular classes on Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., group bible studies on Wednesday or Thursday in the evening from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. once a week, outdoor activities such as a healing camp, volunteering at a Christian shelter for the disabled, and field trips. While continuing participant observation in FS classes, I conducted open-ended interviews with South Korean Christians and North Korean migrants, and accompanied them to various activities including a village office visit, other theological training programs, and other churches. My interview data with North and South Koreans suggests that the North Korea awareness campaign that the South Korean government and civil societies has promoted since the late-1990s has failed to raise both knowledge of and a cultural relativist view toward North Korean culture in South Korea. Meanwhile, South Korean Christians, who consider the migrants to be innocent and genuine, try to inculcate “proper” manners in them—such as using Korean standard language, observing proper sexual conduct, marriage, public etiquette, and parenting. Here Christian morality is mixed with South Korean norms by which Korean

persons are stratified in accordance with their social background (such as economic achievement, school alumni, and birthplace networks). In this regard, I have found that the relationship between the migrants and established South Korean Christians represents the ways in which South Korean class, gender, region, and even race biases take life in this co-ethnic encounter.

During 2007, I conducted intensive fieldwork twice in China: first in late April for a week, and again from late June to late July. I tried to make one more visit in late fall, but the local organization I was affiliated with had to temporarily shut down for security reasons. Nevertheless, I participated in and observed Korean-Chinese churches in two villages and interviewed around thirty individual Korean-Chinese pastors, South Korean missionaries, a Chinese official, and North Korean illegal immigrants. The trips gave me an opportunity to witness the socio-political circumstances that North Korean migrants navigate, and the ways in which the Protestant Church mediates their migration to South Korea or elsewhere. There is no question that North Korean migrants' reactions to and perspectives on Christianity upon their arrival in South Korea are intimately tied to this sort of direct or indirect transnational church support. Combining interview data in China with the migrants' narratives in South Korea, part of my dissertation aims to contextualize North Korean underground railroads through which they encounter particular forms of Christianity and come to hold the so-called South Korean Dream.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 2, "South Korean Evangelical Nationalism" is devoted to providing readers with a general overview of the increasing Korean evangelical activities in these

manifold geopolitical predicaments. Paying particular attention to two categories—suffering and healing/salvation—as the core of Korean Protestantism, I examine two competing Protestant traditions (progressive vs. evangelical) in the pre-division, division, and post-division eras. The second section of this chapter historicizes the emergence of evangelical alliances and analyzes key components of the discourses and activities in envisioning both restoration of national identity—anticommunism—and the revival of Christianity in the North. This chapter thus serves as a political and religious context to better understand the meanings of North Korean Christian conversion.

Chapter 3, “Perilous Crossing, Fragile Rescue: North Koreans’ Christian Encounters in China,” examines the ways in which North Korean border crossers are subjectified as “exemplary refugees” by evangelical humanitarian activities and discourses in China. The border crossers are categorized as “mandate refugees” by UN organizations as opposed to the China-North Korea Agreement on border protection by which the border crossers are categorized as criminals. Within these competing frames, they are both politicized in public, and silenced and subordinated in an asymmetrical church and secret shelter system by evangelical activities. While discussing the terms of human rights and freedom, my micro observation offers how the migrants agentively submit themselves to or appropriate the church in order to obtain a better position in their marginalized condition, and discusses the tension between spiritual freedom (eternal salvation) and this-worldly freedom. This chapter thus demonstrates the migrants’ Christian passage not as instrumental and temporal, but rather intensive and pre-figured before their Christian encounters in the South.

Chapter 4, “The State of Freedom: Regular Citizens, Celebrated Converts,” explores the migrants’ life transition in South Korea. It first examines the government settlement process in which the migrants are depoliticized and silenced for the purpose of normalizing relations with the North. While being mobilized to adjust as “regular citizens” into the South Korean capitalist system, they are expected to be silent regarding the dark sides of North Korea. On the contrary, it is their experience within the church and the logic of conversion that empowers them to “speak” their past “dark” experiences under the “evil” communist regime, and their present blessed life in the South. In this second section, I analyze their conversion narratives as they are invited to “perform” the “Christian passage” for South Korean or foreign Christians. With an examination of this form of testimony, I argue that their conversion is both an interior transformation from Juche to Christianity and a physical relocation from the North to the South.

The themes I have examined in prior chapters culminate in Chapter 5, “Ideal Body, True Christians: The Freedom School.” By providing thick descriptions of the Freedom School, a mega-church-run training program for North Korean newcomers, I shed light on classroom metaphors and healing camp rituals where two different national subjects are encountering cultural differences; interpreting and misunderstanding them in their own terms, and yet at once feeling and sharing love and affection in both the sacred and secular sense.

Chapter 6 concludes my dissertation by summarizing my main points, but in no way offers the final word on North Korean migrants’ Christian passage at all. Rather, it opens up further discussions and questions, hoping to contribute to both practical and academic activities on this issue.

CHAPTER 2

SOUTH KOREAN EVANGELICAL NATIONALISM

“...Let us bring as many of our brethren from the North to the South as possible so that we can shorten the existence of the evil Kim Jong-il regime. At the same time, we all should vote for a Christian nominee [Lee Myung-bak, current president of South Korea] for our next president. That is the way to rebuild the national spirit that has been waning these past ten years, and to hasten the date we save the North by replacing Juche with Christianity and capitalism!”

One evening in January 2007, Kim Sang-Chul, the president of the Commission to Help North Korea Refugees (CNKR)¹⁶ as well as a church elder, a lawyer, and a former mayor of Seoul—was testifying about God’s call for the Christianization of the two Koreas. This highly political and religious account was made at a special event hosted by the CNKR to celebrate the fact that the total number of North Korean refugees (*Talbuk-nanmin*)¹⁷ who had arrived in South Korea had exceeded 10,000. Inspired by this speech, a middle-aged South Korean man sitting beside me began shouting, “Hallelujah!” with a clenched fist. What I was witnessing was a ritual of South Korean evangelical nationalists who aim to spread the Gospel to both Koreas and a telling example of the culture that the majority of North Korean migrants are exposed to and encounter in their passage from China to the South.

¹⁶ CNKR is a Protestant organization founded in April 1999 that is affiliated with the Christian Council of Korea (CCK), the largest association of evangelical churches in South Korea. They claim that the number of North Korean refugees they have brought to the South directly or indirectly is more than 500 as of the end of 2006. In 2006, CCK decided to dissolve the CNKR and merge with Save North Korea, another Protestant interdenominational organization founded in 2004 that seeks North Korea’s collapse (see www.cnkr.org and www.savenorthkorea.org).

¹⁷ In rendering the expressions of these particular people in organizations and mass media related to North Korea, I have decided to use their own terms and translate it in English as “migrants.” CNKR officially translates North Korean migrants as “refugees” in English on their website, www.chnk.org.

According to Kim's account, regime change in North Korea and social reform through Christian outreach would result in the salvation of North Korean individuals who are suffering under an "evil" regime. In the same vein, South Korea must have an evangelical president in order to accelerate the former goals and to lead the country, which had been misled by what he calls "leftist red regimes" (i.e. the presidencies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun), back in the "right" direction, and thus hastening a reunified Christian Korea. This event in its forms and narratives represented the right-wing values of Korean evangelical nationalism, demonstrating its calling as an anticommunist bulwark.

More importantly, these series' of evangelical meetings and campaigns have varied and increased in the context of particular historical junctures. In South Korea these junctures include the economic slowdown since the 1997 IMF Crisis and the elections that followed and their aftermath: the pro-North Korean regimes that promoted the normalization of inter-Korea relations, and the multicultural trends in values and ethnic make-up. Outside the country, the U.S. Bush administration's war on terrorism in the post-9/11 context stimulated Korean evangelicals to hold anticommunist and exclusive soteriology beliefs and to strengthen their calling in the name of God. Lastly, within the Korean Protestant Church, the slowdown of the Christian growth and increasing criticisms from the public since the 1990s has had a significant impact.

A general definition of evangelicalism is a Protestant movement that emphasizes (1) conversion experiences in which one accepts Jesus Christ as one's sole savior and lives according to the Gospel, (2) the Bible as one's ground of faith, and (3) ardent evangelism at home and abroad. But in order to better understand the meaning of

increasing Korean evangelical activities in these manifold geopolitical predicaments, I intend to pay particular attention to evangelical discourses and practices around the themes of suffering and the healing/salvation of Korean individuals and the nation-state. These themes reveal the nature of Korean Protestantism and its relation to ideas of human dignity and a Christian “imagined community” (Anderson 1991(1983)) in South Korea. Drawing on some of the anthropology of religion’s attention to the interrelations of Christianity, modernity, individual/collective subject-making, and nation-state building that I briefly reviewed in chapter 1, this chapter attempts to provide a general overview of evangelical nationalism for a better understanding of the Christian conversion of North Korean migrants and their healing, which I will discuss in later chapters.

This chapter consists of two parts. The first is a brief historical account of Protestantism in modern Korean history divided into pre-division and the aftermath. The second part examines the basic components of Korean evangelicalism through its ritual practices and discourses about suffering in the context of national division and the post-division era.

NATIONAL SORROW AND PROTESTANT HEALING

As we mark this centenary day of the outbreak of the 1907 Pyongyang Great Revival, we desire to see love, freedom, and peace restored in Korea.

... ..

We are aware, however, that today North Korea is in a time of deep suffering; that her people face great hardship and that many have died as a result. We mourn with those who mourn and are deeply concerned for the welfare of the North Korean people.

—Excerpt from <Proclamation of ‘2007 Year of Prayer for North Korea’> by Christian Council of Korea (CCK)

From the start, the rise of Christianity in Korea has been keenly related to the desire of unprivileged people and national elites who were seeking to escape from present suffering (Wells 1990; Yi 1981; Blair 1977; Park M-s. 2009; Ryu D-y. 2009). The suffering at issue was not only that of individuals, but also that of Korea at large under the control of imperial forces. Since these earliest days, Korean Christianity has come to be closely intertwined with ideas of national suffering. In each historical predicament, the path to salvation was twofold: in the pre-division era, there was a tension between the local Protestant leadership's interest in national liberation and the foreign (American) missionary body's convictions about church-state separation. In the division era, a tension emerged between progressive and conservative Protestants, a conflict that continues today in this post-division era.

The Pre-Division Era

When William Newton Blair first arrived in Korea as a missionary in 1901, he was surprised at the “remarkable state of things in Korea, a people by nature intensely religious without any entrenched religion with priests able to hinder the progress of Christianity.” He went on to explain that another condition which accounted for “the remarkable progress of the gospel in Korea in the 20th century is her preparation of suffering and humiliation. The location of Korea creates difficulties. Lying midway between China and Japan she has been for thousands of years a bone of contention between these two nations, both claiming suzerainty over her” (1977: 23). What Blair celebrated at the dawn of Korean modernity was that the country was somehow a predestined ground for Christianization of a people who had experienced tremendous

social and political tumult. This statement suggests that the notion of fertile religious ground was based not only on a multi-religious cultural condition, but also on the suffering and humiliation of local peoples. Thus Blair suggested that the Korean people suffered not only from sins intrinsic to all human beings, but also particular agonies due to the country's physical and geopolitical condition.

When American Protestant missionaries began to arrive in Korea in the 1890s, Confucianism was losing its foothold as was the polity, the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Buddhism had been isolated for some time, while Catholicism had suffered severe and continuous persecutions for a century; and the Tonghak religion (Eastern Learning), later Ch'ŏndogyo (the religion of the Heavenly Way), was an indigenous religious and revolutionary movement against the dynasty and foreign powers that was ultimately defeated. As a result, ordinary Koreans became familiar with monotheistic doctrines thanks to Catholicism and Tonghak, although there was no one hegemonic religious institution that the people relied on (Wells 1990: 8). Meanwhile, shamanism as a folk religion had never really disappeared (see Buswell and Lee ed. 2006 for more details).

Such spiritual and ethical chaotic conditions were caused largely by the increasing foreign interventions, in particular, Japanese imperial forces that intensified underprivileged people's everyday hardships and poverty. As the 500-year-old neo-Confucian Chosŏn dynasty was being annexed by Japanese colonial rule, it is Protestantism which began in 1884 and took only twenty-five years to number 200,000 followers in Korea. The rapid rise of Christianity between 1895 and 1910, Kenneth Wells addresses, “can be accounted for by the weakening of the traditional neo-Confucian, *yangban* [noble class]-dominated social and political structure caused by the Sino- and

Russo-Japanese wars and the imposition of the Japanese Protectorate in 1905” (1990:44). The considerable turning point of that period is the 1907 Great Revival, which took place first in Jang Dae Hyun Church, Pyongyang (the present day North Korean capital) in January and then rapidly spread throughout the nation. It is significant that the Great Revival occurred when the Korean nation was being humiliated and thus it “was pursued against a background of hopelessness concerning the future of Korean society” (Wells 1990:35). Spencer Palmer also sheds light on two local issues that effected “astounding religious movement: (1) long-standing social cleavages between north and south Korea, abetted by the discontent of the *Sangmin* [unprivileged class], and (2) the political-military struggles which centered in north Korea at the time” (1986:82~83).

The people in the northern area of Korea were marginalized and alienated from the central government for centuries. Only a handful of northern origin *yangban* (noble class) was hired, and yet was not able to move up to high-ranking official positions in Seoul because of their regional origin. The famous Hong Kyŏng-nae rebellion of 1812, which underprivileged people (*Sangmin*) vigorously participated in, exemplifies that the Pyongyang area was ruled in a hostile way by Seoul-appointed rulers as a form of structured discrimination of the then-bureaucratic government (see Kim S-j. 2009 for more about the Hong rebellion). As introduced in Wells’ points above, the local people were undergoing consecutive wars followed by epidemics and famine that caused many deaths and widespread hunger.

The series of sufferings imposed by objective conditions (neo-Confucian class hierarchy, chronic alienation in politics, peasant suppression, failures of rebellions, foreign powers’ wars, and so forth) led people to seek individual salvation by repenting

for their sins and wrongdoings before God. Thus, the Revival's leader minister Kil Sŏn-ju (1869–1935) would shape the form and character of Korean Protestantism in which “hopeless” people sought a spiritual, ethical awakening. Although it was not directly seen as a political movement against emerging Japanese rule, Christian conversion for these people meant a search for salvation from this-worldly sufferings and a belief in the Second Coming, an idea that was comfortable to Koreans because of Korean folk ideas of religious millennialism. As Chong Bum Kim asserts, “Belief in the prophecies of the *Chŏnggam nok* (Record of Chŏng Kam), which predicted the fall of the Chosŏn dynasty and the establishment of subsequent dynasties, was widespread in late Chosŏn, especially during periods of social and political turbulence” (2006:151, see also Hwang Sok-young's novel series, *Chang Kil-san*, for more popular writing about *Chŏnggam nok*). On the other hand, according to Wells, some more educated Christians like An Ch'angho regarded the revival as “irrelevant to Korea's burning problems,” (Wells 1990: 34).

The revival and the nationwide independence movements led by Protestant leaders in its aftermath stand for two competing discourses and practices regarding state-church relations in the Christian community. On the one hand, the Korean Protestant leader of the Independence Club, schooling, and even the assembly of hit-squads aimed at Japanese officials tended to prioritize liberating Korea from Japanese colonial rule, thus believing that all the Christian activities should serve this goal.¹⁸ On the other hand, foreign Protestant missionaries perpetuated the doctrine of church-state separation, which

¹⁸ Yun Ch'ihŏ, a prominent Protestant nationalist, thought that “if Christianity were the truth, then it would restore Korean strength and dignity” (Wells 1990:51). Yun put tremendous efforts toward educating Koreans aimed at Korean civilization: “How then, given the present state of our country, can we hope for independence, and even were that attained, how will we be able to defend ourselves against subsequent evils and preserve our land? Thus the pressing need at present is to increase knowledge and experience, teach morality and cultivate patriotism... There is no other instrument able to educate and renew the people outside the Church of Christ” (cited in Wells 1990:51).

Yi Man-yol has interpreted as a strategy to protect church development from the interference of political power (Yi 1981: 64). In the aftermath of the Presbyterian mission's letter to the churches in 1901 that advocated for the separation of church and state, ordinary Christians' interest in the politics decreased. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Korean Protestants played a leading role in the national independence movements (Yi 1981; Wells 1990; Kim J-b. 2006).

In my view, the two different stances about the state-church relationship played an important role in the reconfiguring of Korean-ness in the frame of Christian worldview. Since the dawn of Korean modernity, its history was full of a series of wars and brutal colonialism that structured individuals' daily sufferings. As a way to overcome this suffering, the Protestant Church served as both a refuge for hopeless people in search of safety, and a social institution in which nationalist sentiments as well as advanced knowledge and morality were taught and shared as a way to achieve national independence. As mentioned in the first chapter, in the Korean context the concept of nation did not conflict with the universality of the Christian world.

The suffering of the Korean people, however, did not cease. While a nationalist narrative proudly manifests that the Korean people (*han minjok*) have preserved their own culture (i.e., language, customs, foods, and so on) relatively well even during the Japanese occupation,¹⁹ the Korean peninsula was tragically divided into two states at the 38th parallel as soon as it was liberated from the Japanese colonial rule by the Allied Forces in 1945. The Soviet military stayed in the North and the United States military in

¹⁹ Meanwhile, some scholars in Asian Studies used to commonly assume that Korean history was not distinctive. That is, they regarded its ancient histories as a part of Chinese history, while its modern history followed the Japanese trajectory. Until recent decades, Korean Studies had thus been more or less marginalized.

the South. It was never imagined that this physical division would last so long and lead to the Korean War (1950–1953) that killed about two million civilians and one and a half million soldiers, with over seven million people separated from their families along its cease-fire line. The border is called the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a three-kilometer-wide space that is a technically neutral buffer zone between the two states, and yet is the most heavily-armed area in the world. The peninsula remains technically at war to this very day. There has been virtually no contact between the people of these two countries in which Cold War ideologies have undergirded modern nation-building according to the hegemonic interests of each Korea.

Division Wounds (Bundan Sangcheo)

With the terms *bundan sangcheo* or *got'ong* (division wounds or suffering), national division is a deep-seated structure of feeling of sorrow in people's post-war lives and imaginations. The division as national trauma is directly linked to the tragic histories experienced by most Korean families, affecting even their personalities (i.e., family separation, loss of lovers, hidden past, depression, anger, and hostility). Nancy Abelmann (2003) discovered that when her South Korean friend, nicknamed the Education Mother, talked about her sister's lost purse story, she attributed her sister's ill fate to her personality—which is not separated from their family history and national histories, including national division. Such personalized national sorrows, however, have been filtered and sanctioned by successive anti-communist regimes (1950s–1990s). Instead, these sufferings have been institutionalized and occupied by state regimes through national memorial ceremonies (such as 6.25 War Memorial Day), and are often reduced

and silenced to individual problems (as in the case of *Wolbukja* family, see Lee S. J. 2006).

In other words, South Korean society has had little chance to mourn adequately for the relief of their sorrows and the dead souls of all the victims regardless of which side they belonged to at the beginning era of national partition. Kim Seong Nae (1989), studying shamanism on Cheju Island, noted that local shamans treated individual clients who suffered chronic illnesses, in particular those who were troubled by the spirits of family members who were killed during the April Third Incident, a massacre of pro-communists on Cheju Island in 1948. Likewise, even “division minorities” such as separated families, former spies who went or were about to be sent to the North, North Korean political prisoners imprisoned for decades in the South and so forth, are still haunted by past memories and agonies.

For the Korean Protestant community, national division shaped its political identities which are not homogeneous but largely divided into two factions: the progressive (ecumenical) and conservative (evangelical) tendencies. The two sides have different views on the division and North Korea. Also, when it comes to the emotional and moral project of “healing” national wounds/divisions, progressive Protestants tend to politicize grassroots suffering, while evangelicals have reduced social sufferings to individual problems so that a person requires God’s blessing to be saved. As such, the ideological and theological struggles of the two sides have increased in recent years in South Korea. But the participation of theologians from each side in the debates must be encouraged because the scholarly works tend to transcend the “just say I believe” type of Pentecostal sermons most evangelical pastors have persisted in delivering.

In order to consider the largest differences between the two sides, it is noteworthy that it was not until 1989 that the conservative Protestants launched the organization of the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) as a reaction to the National Council of Churches in Korea (KNCC)'s *Declaration of the Churches of Korea on National Reunification and Peace* (Declaration hereafter) published in 1988. By that time, KNCC represented Korean Christians and actively led South Korean democratization and social justice. It also initiated unification movements. The KNCC in cooperation with the World Christian Council (WCC) persisted in claiming the division as the main cause of all social injustices (labor exploitation, human rights violations, social inequality, and so on) and the US and the then-authoritarian South Korean regime as main forces in perpetuating the division system for their own interests. In the 1988 Declaration, the main points that KNCC manifested and were later disputed by the conservatives are as follows:

First, the division of the Korean people has been the result of the east-west confrontation of the world's superpowers in their Cold War system. Second, Anticommunism is a sin; "We confess that the Christians of the south especially have sinned by making a virtual religious idol out of anticommunist ideology and have thus not been content to merely treat the communist regime in the north as the enemy." Three, "For a wider national unity of the Korean people," as it claims, we must transcend differences in ideas, ideologies and systems. Fourth, "[T]he US troops should be withdrawn and the UN Command in Korea should be dissolved" (KNCC 1988).²⁰

²⁰ Yi Mahn-yol summarizes this declaration as follows; [It], "divided into three parts, begins with a confession of faith regarding the true one God and the mission of the people of the land, proffering faith-based reasons for the Korean Protestant church's need to eliminate the division. In the first part, the declaration proposes a theological basis for a "confession of sin regarding the division and hatred." In the second, it proposes five principles of reunification, by adding the principles of "humanitarianism" and "the

The Declaration also proposed in detail the practical actions and policies that the two Korean regimes and Christian churches should enact in order to achieve their goals. Yi Mahn-yol stresses the declaration as “a milestone in the history of the Korean national reunification movement in that it ‘opened the sluice gates of reunification discussion at the civilian level’” (2006:248).

On the contrary, when the Declaration was published in 1988, the evangelicals for their part were upset at the KNCC’s standpoints which for them were nothing but a pro-North Korean anti-American polemic against the mainstream Korean Church. Park Myung-soo (2009), a professor in church history at Seoul Theological University, summarizes the primary points of dispute the mainstream church organizations made in their announcements at the time. First, they asserted that the division was caused by the Russian-backed Kim Il Sung regime. The KNCC declaration ignored this point. Second, they could not accept the charge that anticommunism is a sin, because they stressed “Korean Church” has played the role of an anticommunist bulwark for protecting the freedom of South Korea from the evil communists. The third point they made was that the South Korean Church has never hated North Korean people, instead they pray day and night for God to save the North Korean believers in underground churches. Fourth, these Christians think that a true unification must be achieved in a way that guarantees religious freedom in a free democratic system. They accused KNCC’s unification theory, in contrast, of being influenced by an outdated and proletariat-oriented South American Liberation Theology. Fifth, they manifested that the mainstream Korean Church does not want the U.S. troops to be withdrawn from the Korean peninsula. Sixth, the evangelical

democratic participation of all members of the nation” to the three-autonomy, peace, and pan-national solidarity—already stated in the July 4 joint declaration” (2006:247).

leadership argued that the Korean Church's anticommunism is a product of Christians' historical experiences. Lastly, they challenged KNCC's legitimacy as a representative of the Korean Church, because KNCC is an organization of only six or so denominations (*Kyodan*) (Park M-s. 2009:124-128). The very next year, those who stood against KNCC organized CCK.

In sum, although the two sides share that the division is a national tragedy shaping the Korean people's sufferings, they have somewhat irreconcilable viewpoints as to the causes and effects of national division, North Korea, and the US. Thus, the two churches have suggested different solutions. As I shall discuss the differences later in this chapter, it is necessary to understand that KNCC considered South Korean unprivileged people's sufferings under dictatorship as a critical chapter in national suffering, while the evangelicals tend to focus nearly exclusively on war refugees' experiences. From the perspective of the latter a certain level of sacrifice was an inevitable part of the national economic development necessary for competing with the communist North. And while the evangelicals consider that the North Korean people are exploited by their "evil" regime, KNCC maintains that the North Korean government and Chosun Christian League (CCL) are legitimate partners in unification talks.

Along with KNCC's declaration, Reverend Mun Ik-hwan's illegal visit to North Korea and meeting with Kim Il Sung in 1989 truly surprised the Korean Church. As a prominent Christian social movement leader, however, he was likely respected by both sides. And for the progressive camp, his visit to North Korea was considered a pioneering adventure that initiated a new post-division era (Kim H-s. 2004). However, for the evangelicals, his philosophy of "unification is the good" transcending all ideological and

religious divides was too radical to accept (Park M-s. 2009). Since then, the division between the progressive and conservative Christians became more precise. At the same time, the social influence and reputation of KNCC waned. In contrast, CCK, claiming the representative Christian alliance of South Korea, today made up of 61 denominations and 21 Christian agencies, began increasing its reach as the leader of Christian movements including unification matters (e.g., North Korean famine relief aid, activities for North Korean refugees, missionary training for national unification, world mission, education, environmental issues, national security, and so forth.

For the CCK participant evangelicals, KNCC's declaration and Rev. Mun's North Korea visit provided an opportunity for mainstream churches to unify and clarify what they said were the Korean Church's identities—anticommunism and the North Korean mission—as opposed to progressive theology. And in terms of the size of congregations, finances, manpower, and thus influences, CCK began leading the Korean Christianity hegemony. Therefore, some evangelicals interpret that since the late 1980s the conflict between the progressives and the conservatives has not deepened, but deconstructed. That is, by organizing CCK, the conservatives emerged as a more empowered group in the Korean Christian landscape (Kang I-ch. 2005; Park M-s. 2009). With South Korean political democratization in the aftermath of the 1987 June Uprising, the emergence of CCK as the largest evangelical alliance in Korean history can be thought of as the beginning of a new era in the South Korean political and social climate.

Post-Division?

In March 2007, it seemed unbelievable that I was on a plane just taking off, flying for only about an hour and would land in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. It was real, however, and not a dream. I was flying directly from Seoul to Pyongyang over the Yellow Sea. Of course, the occasion was due to a South Korean foundation working for cultural and economic exchanges with North Korea which had organized this group visit. There were about 170 people in our group, which consisted of scholars, government officials, artists, and business owners. Although it could be seen as a special occasion, in actuality, it was also at the same time no longer that extraordinary. The Korean peninsula seemed to have finally entered a post-division era in which the reunification of two Koreas seemed possible.²¹

As to a discussion of Korean Christianity in general and evangelicalism in particular, it is inevitable to consider the national division as a specific geopolitical condition that affected the formation of religious characteristics and subjectivity. By stating that this era is post-division (see above), I mean that it is a hybrid, heterogeneous, and shifting historical juncture in which the established values, norms, ethics, and subjectivities that were produced and reproduced in the Cold War context have come to struggle, contest, and negotiate with each other in envisioning a reunified nation (see ChoHan & Yi 2000; Lee S-j 2006; Paik 2006). In other words, while for 5 decades almost all discourses and practices regarding reunification have been dominated by state government in accordance with political and military interests, ever since the Kim Dae-

²¹ One can check the daily status of how many South Koreans are staying or visiting North Korea for various reasons at the official website of the Ministry of Unification, South Korea. During my fieldwork (2006–2007), the average number of South Koreans visiting North Korea for business purposes was around 25,000 per year. However, due mostly to the accelerating political tension between the North and the United States in June 2009, the number decreased remarkably.

jung presidency (1998–2002) civil society and individuals in different positions have been able to join in discussions as to what the reunified nation should look like. Further, the competing debates have come to consider not only structural aspects (i.e., economic aid or reforms) but also cultural and metaphysical concerns (i.e. cultural integration/harmony, education, pan-Korean or beyond-Korean sense of belonging).

Indeed, at the heart of the debates were ideas about a post-division subjectivity and a form of nation-state between progressives (*chinbo*) and conservatives (*posu*).²² I examined the difference between the two camps in Christian community. In this part, the *chinbo* and *posu* include larger issues. In South Korean society, the distinctive criteria between the two categories are different from western conventional understandings. Although this understanding becomes more complicated and/or flexible depending on the issue, the local sense of the term *chinbo* largely means a mode of political and moral sentiments for those who are national (though not pro-US, it is by no means anti-American), and supportive of human rights at the local grassroots level and social minorities (gay/lesbian, migrant workers, female workers, the disabled) and of environmental causes. On the other hand, *posu* is the term referring to those who support pro-US and anti-Communist regimes and political parties with an economic-development-first policy; they tend to identify themselves as rightists (*up'a*) in opposition to leftists (*chwap'a*).

Few people may disagree with the statement that it is the evangelical church leaders who play a leading role in *posu* camps by organizing New Rights movements, anti-Kim Jong-il campaigns in terms of human rights and North Korean refugee issues,

²² For a political science approach, see Haesook Chae and Steven Kim. 2008. "Conservatives and Progressives in South Korea" *The Washington Quarterly* • 31:4, pp. 77–95.

and pro-US campaigns. What they reveal is a modality of division subjectivity that has governed dimensions of South Korean ideology, morality, and spirituality over the last few decades. It was once conceived to be an atheistic nationalism that emerged under Cold War conditions. But as a matter of fact, in light of the recent post-division atmosphere, what becomes visible is the fact that the Korean form of evangelicalism has been deeply intertwined in the formation of division subjectivity. This echoes Aihwa Ong when she states, “Concepts of political identity from the earliest times have almost all been based on religious continuums of greater or less moral privilege or worthiness” (2003:7). The recent activities of South Korean evangelicals are seen as a series of alarmed reactions to the consecutive winnings of the *chinbo* camp in presidential elections, what they call a “lost decade” under the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun regimes.

In the meantime, there is a pan-Korean nationalist sentiment that has long been circulated within the *Chinbo* camp, what Sheila Jager once termed, “romantic reunification” (2003). As a reaction and resistance to Western consumerism, South Korean *minjung* (people) have reinvented local national cultural forms and practices.²³ Amid questions of what philosophical and spiritual ground would help to mediate national reconciliation, the role of religion has been central. Some local elites in recent years have begun reinterpreting Korean shamanism not as a pre-modern, less-developed folk religion, but as an alternative spirituality that is able to encompass other religious beliefs and ideologies including Christianity in the South and socialism in the North.

²³ See Abelmann 1993, 1995, 1996 and Wells ed. 1995 for the discussions about the concept of *minjung*.

Hwang Sok-Yong is one of the leading figures in this line of thought. Hwang recently published two novels, *Sonnim* in 2001 and *Baridegi* in 2007, that suggest an alternative approach to the issue of national division, one more religious than social-structural. What Hwang brings out through his novels is an awakening of the idea that the local religious metaphysics of Korea can meet the universal values of peace, not a reinvention of a national folk religion and not a return to a pre-modern Korea.

Translated to English, *sonnim* means “guest,” but in the novel the term refers to the uninvited “guest” of smallpox, a devastating epidemic in Korea’s history. By referring to this visitor with respect, in accordance with the shamanistic tradition, Korean people treated the virus quite seriously. Thus, *sonnim* is both a religious term and a performance to send smallpox away from a person, home, or village. Hwang’s *Sonnim* is a fictional story based on his own experience after visiting North Korea in violation of the South Korean National Security Law in 1989 (he was consequently imprisoned for five years).

Sonnim centers its story on a historical event known as the Sinch’ŏn Massacre, which took place in Sinch’ŏn, Hwanghae Province in North Korea during the Korean War. Local residents still have memories of the tragic event and the North Korean state repeatedly brings it up to support its anti-imperialist stance against the United States. The male protagonist in the novel is a Korean American pastor in the United States who visits Sinch’ŏn, his hometown, and knows that villagers were killed not by South Korean or U.S. troops, but rather, by one another as if possessed by ghosts. As the story progresses, Hwang seeks to comfort the dead souls who were victims of what Hwang believes to be two imported belief systems from foreign countries that “infected” Korea—Protestantism

and Marxism.

By defining these two ideologies as forced modernity, *Sonnim*, in this sense, refers to the twin foreign influences of Protestantism and Marxism; these forces brought about an “epidemic” in the terms of Western medicine and “ghosts” in the rhetoric of Korean shamanism. Thus in this way, they are viewed as outsiders, temporary “guests” destroying the local people. By expelling the two virus-like ideologies through a Korean *gut* or shamanistic ritual, they seek to reconcile their past memories.

In 2007, Hwang published another novel, *Baridegi*, which tells the story of Bari, a young North Korean female refugee who loses her entire family and ends up living in London. The title itself is taken from the same-named Korean folktale, an epic narrative ritual performed by shamans for relieving a dead soul. The novel is based on the actual life experiences of real North Korean refugees, and touches upon a range of issues: transnational migrant laborers, human trafficking, the post-9/11 US war against terrorism, and the multiple sufferings of Bari, who has the shaman-like ability to communicate with ghosts, souls, and even animals. What is fascinating in this novel is that Hwang has tried to demonstrate how the individual misfortune of a marginalized person like Bari, who experiences dislocation and instability in life, is not the fault of the individual, but rather, the workings of global processes.

Like *Sonnim*, Hwang seems to be suggesting that Koreans can look to the metaphysically more universal (yet very local) cosmology to relieve and eventually overcome the sorrows of Korea’s traumatic past life—rather than only in conventional materialist approaches (capitalism or Marxism). In the case of the two Koreas, Hwang is likely to appreciate local shamanistic elements that remain grounded in both Korean

cultures as a potential mediator that can reconcile this-worldly individual and national sufferings with the souls of the dead.

However, one can ask whether there is a kind of shamanism that is legitimate or seemingly “pure” enough to be legible in both Koreas. Of course, the response would be negative, because Korean shamanism itself has never been homogenous, but instead has exhibited much diversity over time and across regions. A second question would then be in what sense shamanistic performances and cosmology would motivate a broader sense of belonging between the two Korean peoples? Shamanism has been targeted for expulsion in the name of modernization in both Koreas (see Kendall 1985), while at the same time being integrated into Christianity in the South and surviving under socialism in the North. Perhaps Hwang did not intend to reinvent this indigenous form of religion as a contact zone, but rather just to encourage the readers to find a way on our own. I leave further inquiries behind but instead wish to point out that Hwang’s recent works are seen as an example of competing discourses and practices regarding Korean reunification in contemporary South Korea. Keeping this nationalist trend in mind, I turn now to evangelical approaches to both social suffering and healing for salvation with a focus on the organization and theological character of the Korean evangelical church's recent campaigns.

THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN THE POST-DIVISION ERA

Having reviewed that over the *longue durée* of the 20th century Koreans have a keen sense of their own national suffering, I now turn to the ways in which the evangelical churches have promoted individual salvation as the salve for these wounds.

Despite stagnant growth since the 1990s (Lee T. 2006),²⁴ the Korean evangelical church is one of the largest social forces. Referring to local Protestant language, Korean evangelicalism tends to particularly emphasize religious spirituality (*yŏngsŏng*) and salvation (*guwŏn*) on the level of the individual, and revival experiences as a form of ritual on the level of the collective church. Above all, there is a short, well-known idiomatic phrase that best represents the nature of Korean evangelicalism, that is, *Yesu ch'ŏn'guk*, *Bulsin chiok*, which means “Jesus is heaven, unbelief is hell.” This slogan asserts that one’s salvation is granted as soon as one believes in Jesus Christ regardless of any and all past transgressions. Salvation here is not merely interpreted as the gateway to another world, but also in this world.

What is fascinating in the Korean evangelical tradition is that it is always longing for and trying to reproduce the 1907 Pyongyang Great Revival that I introduced earlier in this chapter. Timothy Lee also points out that “[R]evival meetings have thrived and come to characterize Korean Protestantism,” and that “the Korean church (...) has become a leader of international revivalism in its own right, holding some of the largest revival gatherings ever held in Christian history—including the mammoth World Evangelization Crusade of 1980, which reportedly recorded more than seventeen million in attendance” (2006: 332).²⁵ As I will elaborate in chapter 5, this longing for a miraculous revival tends to be demonstrated in intensive group retreat programs and frequent short-term

²⁴ Timothy Lee (2006) pinpoints a series of corruption scandals involving Protestant elites, revealing the cozy relationship between politics and religion, as one of the main reasons for the growth slowdown since the 1990s.

²⁵ In the same article, Timothy Lee ascertains that the emphasis on a revival gathering is not unique only to Korean Christianity, but has been widely exercised and mobilized throughout the history of Christianity. Likewise, the Encyclopedia Britannica lists some examples of Protestant movements such as the 18th century Pietism in Europe, Methodism in Britain, and the Great Awakening in America; later in the 1950s, Billy Graham would spearhead a world-famous revival movement in the United States.

missionary trips in which participants seek to strengthen their spirituality through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The size of the Protestant population in South Korea is remarkable. South Korean churches claim that 25 percent of the entire population is Protestant, whereas in Asia (where 60 percent of the world's population resides), Protestants account for only around 5 percent of the population, far behind other traditional religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. According to a 2006 report by the South Korean National Statistics Office, Buddhists constituted 22.8 percent followed by Protestants at 18.3 percent and Catholics at 10.9 percent. Combining Protestants and Catholics, Christians surpassed Buddhists—29.2 percent to 22.8 percent.

In addition, the Korea World Mission Association (KWMA) recently reported that the number of Korean missionaries serving overseas numbered 19,413 in 168 countries as of January 2009. This makes South Korea the second largest missionary-sending country after the United States; and this figure represents a huge jump since 2000, when the number was 8,103 (see Moon S. S-c. 2003). It has become well known that Korean missionaries target some of the most difficult-to-evangelize countries such as Iraq, North Korea, and China. As *The New York Times* reported, “[They] are eager to do God's work and glorify God. They want to die for God.”²⁶

Despite a number of missionary deaths in Iraq (Kim Sun-il in 2004) and Afghanistan (two missionaries out of twenty hostages in 2007) that led to the rise of fierce criticism against evangelical churches, it is remarkable to see that the number of missionaries overseas keeps increasing. Furthermore, evangelicals played a major role in

²⁶ *New York Times*, November 1, 2004.

making Lee Myung-Bak a “presbyter president” (*Jangro Daetongryung*) in the 2008 election. Lee Myung-Bak is an elder at Somang Presbyterian Church, a mega-church located in Gangnam, one of the richest neighborhoods in Korea. Despite concern over stagnant growth, the recent series of activities and incidents by the Korean church seem to reveal that they have taken the lead in Christianization at home and abroad. Adding to the number of scholarly works on Korean Christianity mentioned earlier, I wish to highlight some other characteristics of Korean evangelicals in the light of three major issues: pro-Americanism, anticommunist evangelical subjectivity, personalized/individualized social sufferings, and the Christianization of the nation.

Instituting Evangelicalism: The Church and Anticommunism

Korean evangelical voices and practices are “God’s calling” as claimed by evangelical leaders who hold both secular and sacred powers in the church hierarchy.²⁷ Within the Korean church, a cultural space where there are both profane and sacred powers among the members and with God, the leadership tends to monopolize the voices and activities concerning national and social concerns. Their authority theoretically comes from and is legitimized by God, and is a particular “capital” attained and accumulated according to the logic of competition in the church market. As South Korea and the churches grew at an excessively rapid pace by promoting this-world oriented theology, they have been successful in mobilizing believers to conceive of their sufferings as personal, while church authorities play a representative role by displaying that their church is also doing “good” for society.

²⁷ “Church ministers’ power much greater than the conglomerates,” published in *Hankyore* 21 (No. 536. November 24, 2004).

Evangelical leaders' sermons are often irrational and emotional, and yet very clear when it comes to the logic of binary opposition—good vs. evil. Their speeches and prayers are accepted by and large as divine. In their language, Marxist ideology and Christianity, more specifically North Korean Juche ideology and South Korean evangelicalism, are intrinsically unable to be joined, integrated, or negotiated between—or even to coexist in the same time or space. Thus, the North is imagined or portrayed as a place devoid of religion, a land of darkness and Satan where the communist regimes of Kim Il-sung and his son Kim Jong-il oppress the Northern brethren. The North is represented “as consisting of two separate realms: the repressive ‘communist party’ and the oppressed ‘North Korean compatriots’” (Lee S-j. 2006: 37). According to this view, the communist party exerts its “evil” influence on the South; the subsequent South Korean student movements, teachers and workers unions, as well as the recent pro-North Korean regimes, are also all the result of propaganda managed and promoted by the *ppalgaengi* (literally, “Reds” but akin to “Commies,” a pejorative term referring to pro-communists) that seeks to brainwash the South Korean populace. Thus, reunification of the two Koreas must be accomplished by eliminating dark spiritual forces in the name of God. Referring back to Kim Sang-chul’s principle that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, reunification will be accomplished by implanting Christianity and capitalism in North Korea to replace Juche (self-reliance).

Evangelical anticommunism is immediately tied to pro-Americanism. This anti-Americanism, however, is not so much an ideological inclination, but a position that supports the continued presence of US military troops to protect South Korea’s national security from the North Korean “Reds.” During times of political tension or instability

with the North, evangelicals proclaim a state of panic. On October 4, 2004, for instance, the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) organized a protest against the Roh administration's National Security Law reform (see Figure 2.1). Several hundreds of thousands of evangelicals and anticommunist organizations participated in the rally, hoisting both the South Korean national flag and the American flag while burning the North Korean national flag. Speaking in turn, various pastors from area mega-churches took the stand to denounce the North. The following is representative of the rhetoric from that day:



Figure 2.1. October 4, 2004, CCK hosting protest against Roh regime at Seoul Square. (from Hankyore News)

Who can say how soon Seoul might be bombed by the North without the Law. ... We should fight against the demons from the North and the demons within the South.—
Dr. Cho Yong-gi, Yoido Full Gospel Church.

When South Korea faced a critical emergency with demonic communism, God came to us by way of the United States. ... God bless the honorable President Bush and the United States of America.

(Excerpt from “Letter to President Bush,” read by Minister Kim H. S.).

Their somewhat radical anticommunism and pro-American tendencies can be understood historically. The massive migration (around 740,000 people) from the North to the South between 1945 and 1950, and during the Korean War (approximately 650,000), anchored these sentiments. Seungsook Moon (2005) stresses that these North-to-South migrants mostly consisted of landowners and former collaborators with the Japanese colonial government. Kim Gi-ok and Soo-jung Lee also add that a large number of these migrants were Christian. One rationalization for their virulent anticommunism then is that these migrants were “natural” dissidents because of the Communist party’s persecution during this violent and traumatic time period. According to this view, Rev. Han Kyung-jik of Youngnak Presbyterian Church founded his church with northerners and came to pioneer the bulwark against communism due to this ingrained hatred against the North Korean communist regime. The founders like Rev. Han of mega-churches had rarely articulated anticommunism as a main topic in their sermons.²⁸ Anticommunism appeared otherwise, in the distinct tones of Biblical language in which “it was God who did not allow the northern communists to conquer this land during the war,” and Germany and Japan were ultimately defeated because God was not with them (Han K-j. 1987: 27).

Meanwhile, a sociologist Kim G-o (1999) argues that the vast majority of North Korean refugees during the war converted to Christianity in the throes of their adjustment to South Korea where they confronted social discrimination. She argues that the church

²⁸ A personal conversation with Kenneth Wells, a professor in history of Korean Christianity in the summer of 2007. In particular, he pointed out that Han Kyung-jik, a founder of Yŏngrak Presbyterian Church (the world’s largest Presbyterian church), has rarely blamed the North Korean regime in early post-War era. Pastor Han was a key organizer of the Socialist Christianity Party founded in the North after the liberation, but soon his party was dismissed as a result of a series of violent clashes with socialists in the North after which pastor Han had to migrate southward.

thus functioned as their community support center. But it is reasonable to speculate that while Christianity clashed with Communist authorities in the North (Grayson 2006), the situation was reversed in the South. The first president, Syngman Rhee, was a Methodist Christian who studied in the United States and later became an honorary elder of Chŏng-tong Methodist Church, the first Methodist Church established by Henry Gerhard Appenzeller in Korea. Further, Rhee appointed Christian ministers and elites to high positions in government, and gave special benefits to the church.²⁹ As a result, the number of Christians increased from 600,000 to 1.6 million during his twelve-year rule (1948–1960). At the heart of this historical context, as many scholars and Korean civilians agree, is the construction of anticommunism as the state ideology and identity perpetuated since the beginning of the South Korean state with Rhee and successive militant regimes. The Korean evangelical's anticommunist pro-Americanism must be seen as a product of collaboration between the South Korean state and the church, initiated and perpetuated by both from the beginning of the divided nation.

The vocabulary of division language thus did not merely emerge and replicate itself under the anticommunist secular regimes, but rather, was a product of the state-church Cold War apparatus. During South Korea's successive military regimes and through the Kim Young-sam administration (1993–1998), Korean evangelicals were relatively unseen compared to their progressive counterparts in the fields of civil and political movements. Their claim in the past that the church was supposed to separate

²⁹ Some of these can be listed as follows: Major national ceremonies were performed according to Protestant tradition; the army chaplain system and prison chaplain system were established; Christian newspapers, broadcasting system, and education facilities and programs (e.g., schools, YMCA and YWCA) were built or supported; foreign missionaries were given preferential treatment; substantial aid and goods from the US through the Korean Christian Association to individual churches, theological schools, and ministers were distributed (see An Jong-chol 2009).

itself from government echoed American missionaries' pleas against Korean anti-Japanese movements during the Japanese colonial period (see Wells 1990, Grayson 2006). In contrast, the Roh Moo-hyun regime initiated such policies as supporting the repeal of the anticommunist National Security Law, Private School legal reform, examining the national past for state injustices, and controls on press ownership. These moves seemed to challenge the powers of the church, and evangelical leaders began reviving the state ideology of the past in the name of God to protect their hegemonic status in the South. All the evangelical anticommunist campaigns and protests have been called *gu-guk gidohoe* or "prayer meetings for national salvation."

In the meantime, it is hard to conclude that the vast majority of believers attending evangelical churches fully support their ministers' anticommunist campaigns. We can assume that this series of evangelical interventions on behalf of the state is not always by the lay men and women in their congregations. More accurately, however, church members in general are not concerned about their pastors' involvement (or lack thereof) in political issues. As progressive pastor Kim Jin-ho stressed to me, "This is our Korean church tradition. No one tends to care what their pastor does outside of the church, although there are always some who dislike their pastor's position on political issues."³⁰

This phenomenon drives us to examine another aspect of anticommunist mechanisms in the church system. Indeed, if one resists his/her anticommunist pastor in church, s/he would immediately be labeled as being possessed by evil, and therefore in need of healing by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Korean evangelical church system works to personalize the "evil" contamination once it is considered to have infected an

³⁰ From an interview conducted on December 11, 2007 at his office.

individual. Now I will turn to the inner workings of church rituals in which South Korean “personal” sufferings and this-worldly salvation are predominant and the processes are governed by charismatic leaders, which in turn act upon Korean evangelical subjectivities.

Pentecostal Healing: Prosperity, Health, and Spirituality

The main hall of Yoido Full Gospel Church was filled with the sounds of voices, songs, and prayers echoed by the orchestra, choirs, and about twenty thousand adherents who were all inspired by Rev. David Cho, their head pastor. In his 70s, Rev. Cho delivered his sermon with a powerful voice, a quick pace, and flawless articulation. I was sitting in my seat along with the crowd, listening to his long sermon and I turned to look at those who were sitting next to me: a young girl leaning her head on her mother’s shoulder, as if sick; a pale-faced woman in her late 20s; an older woman next to her with her eyes closed; and a middle-aged woman, among others. I came to feel as if I was sitting in a waiting room for sick patients. In contrast to Rev. Cho’s energetic sermon, they looked tired and ill, and they looked as if they were from the countryside or perhaps poor urban neighborhoods.

As the sermon was about to come to a close, Rev. Cho suggested praying together while “placing your hands on those places in your body that ache.” Everyone stood up: the mother held her sick daughter in her arms; the pale-faced woman crossed her arms on her chest as if to show that it was her soul that ached, and the woman on my left placed one hand on her shoulder and the other on her belly. Many others in the hall either held their arms out above them or held their own or other bodies. I found myself placing one of my hands on the right side of my belly where I had suffered from shingles shortly

before my field research and the other on my chest (although as I think back I don't know why I chose my chest in particular). The hall vibrated with shouting, crying, and music. Whenever Pastor Cho recited "X, Y, Z sufferings, go away in the name of Jesus Christ!" the congregation responded with either "Hallelujah!" or "Amen!" putting emphasis on each syllable, making for a powerful repetitive response. It was as if their bodies were punctuating, celebrating the sermon.

More than ten minutes later, as Rev. Cho slowed and toned down his prayer, the "speaking in tongues"—the charismatic phenomenon of speaking in unintelligible words as a sign of the Holy Spirit and often accompanied by weeping, shouting, and involuntary shaking of the body—faded out. Then Rev. David reported that "a person who has suffered from chronic back pain has recovered, a person who had epilepsy has recovered, and ..." etc. The "miraculous" healing had been realized and I actually felt as if my shingles had slightly improved as well. I came to think that the women would continue to come to church in their desire to be healed, probably with the expectation that their pains would be released sometime into the future. Thousands of people quickly and silently exited the church as thousands of other people hurriedly entered the hall for the next service, quickly taking the seats closer to the altar, perhaps in the hopes of receiving a more effective and powerful anointing by the Holy Spirit.

This first-person experience of Pentecostal worship inspired me to reconsider evangelical subjectivity as it is shaped through a series of suffering and healing rituals. First, in theory, evangelicalism emphasizes the "personal" relationship between God and the individual. However, my ethnographic research suggests that the tropes of "individual" and "personal" work to conceal the secular role of the church as a social

cultural institution and its leadership, as well as the importance of membership. Indeed, for Korean evangelical Protestants, there is perhaps no more fundamental “sign” in the performance of their religious piety than regularly “showing up” at church on Sunday in South Korea. Church attendance is a symbolic practice from which other “sacred” experiences such as worship, hearing the Word, and praying together can be experienced. Church is considered not only as an authentic and legitimate space through which a “personal relationship with God” and healing are ultimately manifested, but also as a discursive domain in which the members are expected to perform the way that they have learned with each others’ behaviors in accordance with church hierarchy and tacit regulations. Thus, congregations in South Korea tend to be ideologically conservative and largely anti-communist, socially docile to patriarchic and hierarchic family and church systems, active in church-centered activities (i.e., regular attendance, morning prayer, group bible studies, and volunteering for church events). They often behave somewhat exclusively (sometimes to the point of intolerance) in regard to other faiths and denominations, and tend to be culturally resistant to certain “worldly” customs and habits such as drinking and smoking, which are seen as taboo.

Porterfield also suggests that Christian healing calls our attention to the ways in which suffering is intrinsic to living a Christian life. She states: “Part of Christianity’s appeal as a means of coping with suffering is the idea that suffering is not meaningless but part of a cosmic vision of redemption. ... Thus, many Christians have accepted the onset or persistence of suffering as part of religious life, while also celebrating relief from suffering as a sign of the power and meaning of their faith.” She continues, “Beneath this apparent paradox, a fairly consistent tendency to experience suffering as a means of both

self-understanding and communion with others have enabled many Christians to rest easier with pain and death, even as healing experiences have energized Christians, enabling some to defeat pain and death, at least temporarily”(2005:4).

Similarly, sociologist Kelly Chong finds that Korean women can find meaning in their suffering in the process of their conversion to Christianity. She writes: “[A]nother central way by which women are moved toward healing and in their ability to cope with domestic situations is through the act of self-surrender,” which is considered to be a crucial turning point in evangelicalism in general, and as “a major source of psychic relief” for Korean evangelical women in particular (2006:359). In other words, although there are persistent sufferings that Christians bear in their lifetime, through the conversion process, they come to translate their sufferings in biblical terms, namely as the work of a sovereign God. Therefore, Chong argues that although Korean Christian women converting and devoting themselves to Christianity can be seen as instrumental in their liberation from a patriarchal family system, they end up accepting and reintegrating into the domestic order from which they had once wished to escape (Chong 2006, 2008).

Chong’s findings on Korean evangelical women whose narratives of sufferings are linked with issues of Korean gender and family tensions, suggest that what I witnessed with the women sitting next to me at Yoido Full Gospel Church was not merely a simple desire for instantaneous healing. Rather the women may have gained strength, hope, and confidence to return to their familial and social lives where they would face the same problems again and again. But they are consoled that Sunday comes every six days. Within the Christian community and by other religions and atheists as well, these evangelicals are sometimes criticized for being “Sunday Christians” or “rice

Christians,” and Christians themselves speak pejoratively about those with superficial and hypocritical faith. Nonetheless, it gives us a sense of how attending church only on Sundays means something deeper than the common perception of “warming the pews” and that these individuals may feel comfort and rejuvenation once a week by attending church.

Korean evangelical concerns tend to emphasize “this-worldly life” and “the primacy of faith-healing,” two of five important themes that Andrew Kim points out as examples of convergence between Korean religious tradition and Protestantism (Kim A. 2000). What is important to note is that these tendencies, pre-dated and converged with Protestantism in Korea, were likely to have functioned as a discursive condition by which the believers came to rely on and were bound within the church system as discussed above. Just as Cho and his followers have preached, the vast majority of South Korean Protestant churches emphasize that “a material and economic paradise [is] to be realized in this life, not in the next” (Kim A. 2000: 120, also see Ryu 1965; Yun 1964; Lee 1977).

In relation to the formation of Christian citizenship, Korean evangelical leadership perpetuates “this-worldly” blessings, as represented by Rev. Cho’s service above. The emphasis of worldly well-being and healing is largely interpreted as having arisen from Korea’s indigenous shaman tradition, and further as an essential element contributing to the explosive growth of Christianity in South Korea (Jang N. 2004, Kim A. 2000).³¹ On the other hand, there are critical views in global Christian circles regarding Rev. Cho’s theology of prosperity (the threefold blessings of God such as

³¹ Cho’s charismatic performance has often been circulated as a joke among local Korean anthropologists in religious studies circles. For instance, when foreign scholars came to South Korea with an interest in studying Korean shamanism, it is often suggested that they attend Yoido on Sunday to witness one of the greatest shamans in the country. Likewise, it has become common to acknowledge that characteristics of Korean Christianity have synchronized with Korean local religious traditions.

health, prosperity, and salvation). For instance, an American Christian organization, Biblical Discernment Ministries (BDM), introduces Cho's theology on their website. For them, Cho's ministry of healing is crucial to understanding his church growth:

Divine healing is another method which Cho uses to generate **church growth**, claiming this is the most essential element. This is unbiblical for many reasons. First, it rests on a false premise. The Bible shows explicitly that healing or miracles do not necessarily bring a person to the saving knowledge of Christ (cf. Matt. 9:22-25, 32-34; 11:20-24; Acts 4:5-22). Second, it fosters wrong motivation since it encourages the crowd to come to church with ulterior motives. Third, it obscures the true purpose of healing, which in the Bible authenticates the messiahship of Christ and the apostleship of apostles. Finally, Cho's concept conceals the true nature of healing since he confuses functional disorders with organic illnesses. Furthermore, contrary to the Biblical pattern, Cho fails to "heal" some (all?) who desire healing [bold letters in original].³²

At first glance, this criticism certainly sounds reasonable and valid. Yet whether it is unbiblical or not, this strong Weberian sense of Protestantism accentuating economic prosperity as a sign of blessing is not unique to South Korea, but is widespread in Third World countries influenced by Pentecostal churches. Anthropologist Jill Wightman (2007) documents the ways in which the Bolivian Pentecostal Church brings physical healing forth by "altar calls" during services. She also sheds light on how the articulation of healing intersects with neoliberal Bolivian subjectivity. Katherine Wiegele (2005) also illuminates the ways in which El Shaddai, a form of popular Catholicism with Pentecostal elements, gained popularity by promoting a "prosperity movement" with an emphasis on healing, prosperity, and confession in the Philippines. Thus, the Korean evangelical tendency toward material interests is certainly not only a matter of Korea's shamanistic tradition. These features have also been significantly amplified in the context of Korea's Cold War modernity.

³² Retrieved in <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/cho/general.htm>

Third and most importantly, the focus on physical health and material prosperity does not necessarily mean the diminution of the importance of spirituality at all. Indeed, the term spirituality is inseparable from healing in the evangelical vocabulary. For example, almost all kinds of special healing retreats or camps have *yǒngsǒng ch'iyu* or spirituality healing as both the title and ultimate goal of the event which in turn are visualized as “miraculous” experiences of direct or indirect physical healing. Practices such as “laying on hands” (i.e., placing one’s hand on another’s infirmed body) for physical or spiritual healing are thus popular at these events, and experiences such as “speaking in tongues” are one of the most significant signs of an individual’s spiritual revival. In the same vein, an individual must “speak” of their conversion experience. Spirituality must be therefore embodied. In Rev. Cho’s case, he preaches a fourth dimension spirituality that involves visualization and mediation. Rather than an ambiguous faith, Cho clearly articulates faith as a concrete reality. With respect to the relationship between spirituality and physical well-being, Korean evangelical doctrine does not appear to have deviated from Biblical teaching, at least in theory.³³ However, one should note that corporeality is the only legitimate form of spirituality in practice in the tradition of Korean evangelicalism. This aspect is very significant as a context in which North Korean migrants are situated in the process of conversion to Christianity, as I shall elaborate in the next chapter.

³³ Porterfield explains that although Gospel writers distinguish exorcism and physical healing, “it would be a mistake to read into it a Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body or to suggest that the gospel writers viewed demonic possession as a spiritual problem wholly separate from the natural problems to which human beings were heir. From the gospel writers’ perspective, sin lay at the root of sickness as the underlying cause of the malevolence to which all kinds of misfortune could be traced; so illness and disability clearly had spiritual implications, either as punishments from God or as manifestations of malevolent spiritual powers lurking about the cosmos” (2005:22).

In addition to the acknowledgment of the interconnection between the physical and the spiritual in Christian doctrine, it is simultaneously crucial to understand the ways in which the emphasis of the corporeality in spirituality evolved from within a particular local historical context—post-war South Korea. Simon, a staff member at Good People, the civil organization of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, once told me a story of how Rev. Cho integrated this-worldly happiness into his theology in the Korean post-war context:

When opening his own chapel [in the late 1950s when Korean society was still undergoing post-war turmoil—my addition], our pastor [Rev. Cho] witnessed that physical illness was one of the greatest challenges in people’s quotidian lives. Instead of preaching about spiritual recovery, he prayed to God for the power of healing. One day he visited a house where a poor and severe paralytic was dying. While praying he laid his hands on the poor man’s body. It was a critical moment because he had never done such a thing before and the villagers were watching him. He was actually nervous and desperate thinking that if he failed his ministry career would end, too. But God blessed him with a miracle. The poor man who was dying recovered his health, and since then, the size of his church congregation mushroomed.

A dramatic miracle that the young Rev. Cho did not even convince himself of took place in a critical moment. It was not him, but through him, that God appeared to heal such desperate people and then made his church into the world’s largest church. Simon buttressed his own belief with this miraculous event even though he had not witnessed it personally. Indeed, this story was already scripted and widely known through Rev. Cho’s biography and church webpage. The circulation of this “miracle” does not only imply that Korean evangelical healing as a religious practice (the pursuit of physical and spiritual well-being in this world and eternal salvation in the next) has been a driving force in the rise and rapid growth of Christianity. The storytelling itself also redirects the teller and the audience from seeing other secular and institutional factors such as systematic supports for Christianity initiated by the Syngman Rhee regime in the 1950s

that were mentioned earlier. Indeed, I argue that these factors were as significant to the church as the Holy Spirit in the context of post-war Korea.

Considering the local geopolitical specificities, individual suffering, whether Christian or not, it is hardly separable from the problems of the society to which the individuals belong. Doubtless, Korean evangelical leaders will often practice exegesis of the Bible by applying it to current social issues, but the fundamental “solution” (or ultimate healing) for the root cause of all kinds of problems is always accomplished only through “the personal relationship between you and God.” Chung Yong-sup, a Korean theologian who has analyzed the sermons of well-known Korean pastors, underscores the point that Rev. Cho implies: that human salvation is accomplished not through social reform or democratization, but only by a personal relationship with God. The content of all his sermons also promotes individuals to become attached to wealth, health, and success (see Chung Y-s. 2006).³⁴

Scholars in Latin American studies and medical anthropology have underlined the ways in which individual suffering and illness that are narrated in testimonies almost always stem from structural poverty, signifying social suffering, and can be used as a “weapon of the weak” (Scheper-Hughes 1994:233, cited from Wightman 2008:117-131). It is noteworthy that this insight, however, does not fully explain the ways in which the individual testimonies and narratives can be confined within the domain of church and reduced to the church authority system.

³⁴ Rev. Cho’s theology emphasizes the Threefold Blessing applying to the complete man: spirit, soul and body. “The Threefold Blessing is a term which encompasses the complete salvation of mankind” (for more details about his theology, see <http://english.fgtv.com/gospel/threefold.htm>).

As mentioned earlier, church leadership monopolizes the processes for both the testimony of sufferings and for this-worldly salvation. Under this condition, the personal relationship between God and believer is also mediated by the leadership. Accordingly, one must be cautious not to misunderstand evangelical theology as tending to value the individual *over* society. Rather, the church serves as a social unit and heterogeneous space in which individual believers are organized, managed, and mutually governed according to the techniques of membership management that have evolved for centuries. Through this social unit and space, believers share emotions and personal stories; and the church social hierarchy and norms are reproduced in the doctrine of Korean evangelicalism (see Chong 2008). Again, central to understanding the doctrine and the church's mechanisms is the evangelical leadership which was formed in the intersecting nexus of state support and the needs of a deprived people during the South Korea's period of rapid industrialization period in South Korea.

Conversion beyond Anticommunism

Evangelical leaders identify Korea and Koreans as a "chosen people and nation" who will play a leading role in evangelizing the world.³⁵ This thinking naturally leads people to assume that the Christianization of all nations is the ultimate task and calling for all Christians. I witnessed that this discourse extended to the process of reunification as well as for global missions. By emphasizing the theme of national Christianization,

³⁵ Referring to the Exodus, South Korean people are portrayed as "the chosen" to reveal God's blessing. Interestingly, the evangelical interpretation of the Exodus event is different from Minjung (the people) theology (progressive Protestantism similar to Liberation theology). Minjung theologians consider the Exodus as a founding Biblical narrative for Minjung Theology (Kim W. 2006), as the story highlights a key aspect: "the suffering of the *minjung* is not the original condition meant for God's people but rather a consequence of the Fall (here interpreted as not from Adam and Eve's sin but from social injustices)" (Chang P. 2006: 207).

evangelical leaders placed the believers' patriotism linked to this-worldly interests into Biblical language. For example, the North Korean famine and its general poverty since the 1990s have been simply translated into their discourse as evidence of God's "curse" resulting from the nation's idolization of Kim Il-sung, the founder of North Korea. And as the number of North Korean migrants who flee the North and settle in the South increases, the leaders who preached this evangelical nationalism have become more empowered as modern-day prophets, making the Christianization of the entire peninsula seem more realistic.

Andrew Kim stresses that "Many pastors and Christian leaders advanced the notion that the establishment and prosperity of Korean churches as well as the Christianization of the nation is a patriotic and assured means to save the country from all social ills" (2000: 122). But "all social ills" here are not the same as those that progressive Protestants have tried to heal. Rather, the evangelical concept of social ills is likely linked to a sociopolitical condition in which leftists or non-Christian groups are active. However, it is in the post-division context that the evangelical North Korean mission, which is given priority before unification, brings to light the ethical and theological questions about forgiveness as opposed to the Korean conventional anticommunism. In short, can or should 'we' forgive the Reds too?

There is no single agreement, but at least a slight redirection from a conventional irreconcilable anticommunism to an ambiguous one seems to have taken place in recent years. That is, in the logic of evangelical conversion, the "enemy" seems no longer an object to "smash," but to "convert" to Christianity. The difference is still vague and not

coherently shared among evangelicals, but I will briefly examine the significance of such a shift.

As mentioned earlier, South Korean division language has distinguished between the Reds and innocent victim-subjects in the North. Likewise, ‘we’ must find out and smash the Reds within ‘us’. Further, both Korean societies have perpetuated a racialized view of the families of the ‘enemy’. In the case of South Korea, as the guilt-by-association idea represents, family members of those who went up to the North (that is, Soo-jung Lee’s *Wŏlbukja* family case) were suspected as potential enemies because they might be ‘contaminated’ by their bloodline.

In other words, communism was something contagious that could be caught by or passed down to other family members. The communism in the North and capitalism in the South have all been conceived as biological elements like a blood cell in terms of the family metaphor, the blood that may not be fully remedied (cf. Hwang sees those ideologies as viruses temporarily infecting Korean national ‘souls’, as mentioned earlier). Referring to such racialized and emotionally bended anticommunism that the right-wing advocates have internalized, South Korea-led absorption unification may inevitably entail a process of legal and ethical punishments to those who are suspected as communist collaborators (see Wilson 2003, 2001, 1997 for the studies of national reconciliation processes and human rights).

However, the emergence of recent North Korean migrants and their conversion to Christianity call our attention to the logic of conversion. Unlike the first generation North Koreans (mostly war refugees), the new migrants are those who once participated in developing North Korea into a socialist country. Even some former high ranking officials

in the North came to the South and received legal citizenship as well as benefits without being accused of being division criminals. Instead, as I will elaborate in the fourth chapter, they are celebrated and expected to be the vanguard of the North Korean mission. This conversion process implies that the long-lasting anticommunism is now in the process of transformation from the political to the religious, but that the direction is not yet fixed. At least it is becoming clearer that the evangelical zeal of the Christianization of a nation may possibly conflict with the legal and political national reconciliation processes in the future.

CONCLUSION

I have examined key components of Korean Protestantism in relation to its discourse and practices regarding the concepts of suffering, salvation, and spirituality. As a main contextual background, the first part of this chapter paid particular attention to the national suffering that is historically and collectively sensed in Korean structures of feelings throughout modern history. The second section of this chapter has elaborated the ways in which the Korean evangelical church has appeared to restore anticommunist sentiments in order to clarify an ideal unification process.

The main arguments can be summarized as follows: first, I have paid more attention to the extent to which evangelical doctrines of suffering and salvation are dominated by church leadership, which indeed needs further study for the Korean evangelical church. Church leaders were agents in the rise of the Korean church in conjunction with the successive anticommunist regimes in South Korea, and integrated various forms of religious performances and discourses into Korean evangelicalism.

Moreover, they tend to monopolize, legitimize, and filter the voices of members and often God. Second, by examining evangelical practices and discourses of the soteriology, I ascertain that the accentuation of this-worldly blessings is not only a reflection of its exclusiveness to other religious beliefs, but also a technique by which social sufferings are individualized and the individualized sufferings are necessarily healed as a sign of God's blessing within the church system. Thus, Korean evangelicals have produced and reproduced anticommunist pro-American sentiments as both secular and sacred means to revive the speed of church growth and to accomplish what they call God's calling for the Christianization of the nation and beyond.

Recalling Kim Sang-chul's speech from the beginning of this chapter, let me turn to the last part of that event. The event went on and on. I was hungry, as were my North Korean friends. A large number of people had already left, but the migrants were told to remain in their seats in order to receive a small gift as a token of appreciation. The gift turned out to be an umbrella. Only the North Koreans were allowed to receive this gift, one for each person. I recognized all of the migrants who were in charge of distributing the umbrellas to their migrant colleagues. I happened to receive one as an exception. As we proceeded to exit the main gate, five or six North Koreans were standing with pickets signs that read: "XXX should save my family!" "XXX is an inhuman broker, criminal!" among other things. XXX was one of the awardees at the ceremony and a team director of the CNKR which has been managing the Underground Railroads through which many North Koreans have come to South Korea by way of China. I mused that perhaps their family members had been arrested and sent back to the North while planning their escape or while on the CNKR's routes. This strategy has drawn media attention so the escapees

are making a life-or-death decision by choosing to leave North Korea. The migrants standing outside in the freezing cold were of course not given the umbrellas. For me, the umbrella was a fitting metaphor of the pastoral care provided by the church—care that extended only so far, to those willing to sit through the sermons, to those relatively obedient as if they participated in daily cell meetings in the North—which will be further examined in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 3

PERILOUS CROSSING, FRAGILE RESCUE: NORTH KOREANS' CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS IN CHINA

The previous chapter ended with a brief account of how the Korean evangelical Church has turned up its anticommunist voice in regards to the North Korean mission. Since the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) was founded as the largest Christian alliance in 1989, evangelicals set up their policy to achieve the North Korean mission as a unique calling from God given to Korean Christians (CCK 1995). Korean national unification became no longer only a national subject but rather a sacred supreme task for the kingdom of God. To achieve this goal, CCK has promoted three main campaigns: North Korean Church Reconstruction, Help North Korean Refugees, and North Korea Aids (Park M-s. 2009; Yi M-y. 2006).

This chapter examines the second campaign, Help North Korean refugees, in which North Korean border crossers in search of food and “freedom” came to encounter Christianity as a form of “modern, rich, and humanitarian” capitalism in opposition to an “outdated, poor, and evil” socialism in the Sino-North Korean border area. In the Bible and Christian tradition alike, St. Paul’s conversion is conceived as one of God’s most dramatic miracles. The story of his drastic transformation from a notorious persecutor of Saul to the apostle Paul may not be legible, unless it begins with the moment that he was called by God on his way to Damascus. So too are the North Korean conversion stories illegible unless we begin in China. Statistics continue to show that a vast majority (80–90%) of North Korean migrants who arrived in South Korea have first encountered

Christianity in China.³⁶ Without knowing the migrants' Christian experiences in China, it is difficult to understand the whole picture of the mutual yet awkward reliance and relation between the Korean Church and the migrants in South Korea, which I will discuss in following chapters.

My primary concerns in this Chinese context are twofold. First are the problems of evangelical missionary works associated with universal human rights discourses. Second is the church as a co-ethnic space where the migrants' religious and social lives in confines are pre-figured. For the first concern, I argue that the humanitarian missionary efforts seemed to reframe North Korean migrants as "exemplary victims" (Malkki 1996: 384) according to a universal human rights doctrine. American anthropological works have long criticized the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and how international institutions apply the "Western norm" (Asad 2003) to a specific group of people with little regard to its local cultural and historical particularities (AAA 1947, 1999; Asad 2003; Cohen 1989; Cowan eds. 2001; Malkki 1995, 1996; Messer 1993; Wilson 2003). Lisa Malkki (1996) illuminates that Hutu refugees in a refugee camp appropriated the refugee category by historicizing the condition to enhance their political subjectivity "as a nation in exile"; while the staff members of the international

³⁶ Though a scientific survey has never been done, according to local agents working in the field a startling 80–90 percent of North Korean migrants in China secretly receive or rely on Protestant support. For example, this is demonstrated in an interview clip from the prospective of missionaries shown on the PBS Wide Angle program in 2009. The number of North Korean migrants in China is reportedly between 30,000 and 200,000, while the PBS Wide Angle program reported roughly 100,000 in 2009. Among them, 75 percent are women (Amnesty International 2007; CRS 2007), and 80–90 percent of all North Koreans in China are reported to be victims of trafficking (CRS 2007: 5). Following the work of Kato Hiroshi (2008), I could divide the migrants in China into three groups: The first are "migrant workers" who would return to North Korea with their earnings from China; the second are "settle-in" or "long-term aliens" who stay relatively long periods of time as brides or workers; and the third is comprised of "settle-in-a-third-country" individuals who seek to move from China to a third country. More than 80 percent of these migrants, as I noted previously, look to settle in South Korea. It can be said that for a majority of the migrants, China serves as a temporal and insecure harbor.

organizations working with the Hutu tried to depoliticize the category and treat them as universal humanitarian subjects.

The case of North Korean migrants in China shows quite different and double-layered effects due mainly to the ambiguous status of North Korean migrants. They are categorized as illegal border crossers and are subject to arrest, deportation, and imprisonment by both Chinese and North Korean governments. But international organizations categorize them as “mandate refugees” according to an international law. Considering the local situation, they do not have legal status as refugees in the region. In this context, as the most active human rights agents in the Sino-North Korean border area evangelical missionaries politicize and historicize the migrants’ subjectivity in public in an attempt to bring international attention to the issue, consequently aiming at the Chinese, North Korean, and South Korean regimes (I shall show why the South Korean regime is included here). Note that there have been many *visual images* of the migrants as “victim-subjects” widely spread throughout the mass media in the recent decade. Documentary films such as *Seoul Train* in 2003 and *Crossing Heaven’s Border* in 2009, and a considerable number of journalist articles have constructed the migrants as human rights victims and thus “political refugees.”

Without the intent to devalue the activities, however, I posit the fact that the migrants in “secret” Christian shelters are indeed largely silenced literally and metaphorically. My empirical data reveal that although the migrants come to have a “voice” in the language of evangelical humanitarianism, the conversion processes are composed of somewhat strong regulations and confinements. In such a restricted condition, the fact that they are mobilized to refashion and translate their homeland

system and cultures alike as “deviant” in comparison to the universal standards—Christian ethics and free market economy (Ong 2003; cf. Asad 2003)—thus calls our attention to what “freedom” in human rights vocabulary or “salvation” in evangelical term means to these legally and socially marginalized border crossers.

My second concern thus moves on to the church and secret shelters that are operated by Korean-Chinese missionaries who in turn are supervised by South Korean missionaries. For the border crossers, the Christian Church (or “*jiàohuì*” in local vocabulary) is crucial ‘must-know’ knowledge among North Korean border crosses when, in search of food, they cross the Tumen River into China. At the same time, the church stands as the most dangerous terrain into which the border crossers are forbidden to go and associating with a church is reported to be the highest crime of national treason in North Korea (ICG 2006).³⁷ Nevertheless for the border crossers, the church is integral and exists in varied forms with various meanings.³⁸

My micro-participation and observation in the field suggests that the co-ethnic interactions in church are asymmetrical and gendered. The tri-cornered relationships among the migrants, Korean-Chinese, and South Korean missionaries are not only

³⁷ Many migrants testified to me about their trials in a detention center: “First question I was asked was ‘whether you went to church, or received a help from a missionary’. Second is ‘whether you met with a South Korean intelligent agent who disguises as a tourist or missionary,’ and so on.” The most tragic story often ends with a public execution of converted individuals and expelling their family members to an “unlivable” place according to the testimonies. However I have never met those who actually saw the execution of Christians in the 2000s. As borders creates narratives, the contacts and interactions between North Korean border crossers and Protestantism in the Sino-North Korean border area are filled with tensions of life and death, illegality, intensity, and deviances.

³⁸ Along the borderline, the church appears in the form of aid kits (which may contain socks, medicines, bread, etc); or a taxi driver who provides free rides to a city; a safe house or shelter where migrants can hide, recover, and work through their next steps; an orphanage (often called an ‘aunt’s house’) where separated children stay and wait for their parents; a registered Korean-Chinese church which provides them with temporary aid; smugglers who could move them out of China; South Korean missionaries or researchers; and last but not least, the church is a space through and by which the migrants come to imagine a new sense of belonging: another homeland (South Korea), freedom, and they try to realize these dreams by resorting to underground railroads.

intersected by spiritual knowledge and practices, but also stratified and contested in light of class distinctions and cultural differences. By examining the complex interactions of the co-ethnic groups, I highlight that such an asymmetrical nature of the relationship in which the migrants are positioned at the bottom, in turn, tends to disorder the relationship between “this worldly” (spiritual salvation remaining in China) and “other worldly” (imagining South Korea) salvations.³⁹

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

“I don’t understand why you don’t have any religious affiliation. South Korea gives freedom for people to have a religion. Why do you throw your freedom away? ...It’s nonsense that you don’t have any religion. Please go to church as soon as you get back to South Korea. Don’t lose your right to be free!” (Jiny, a 21-year old North Korean female born-again Christian. 2000)

Through Ms. Choi, a well-educated and decent female Korean-Chinese catechist, I met Jiny at a small restaurant in a major city of the Korean-Chinese Autonomous prefecture in China in the summer of 2000.⁴⁰ First, Jiny asked me which church I was attending in South Korea. As I gave her the vague answer “well, actually I can’t say that I have a religion now,” she seemed embarrassed. Jiny interpreted my atheist attitude as a

³⁹ The material presented in this chapter is based on three intensive fieldwork trips in the Yanbian area: one in 2000, and two others in 2007. During these trips I met with South Korean NGO workers, Korean-Chinese Christians, and North Korean border crossers. The seven year time span provided me with a stronger historical understanding of the sea changes that were taking place: increasing feelings of fear and insecurity; decreasing numbers of North Korean street beggars; decreasing numbers of churches which once cared for the border crossers; more systemized management skills of local secret shelters; and an increasing number of defector-brokers operating underground railroads. However, North Korean migrants’ *liminal* conditions persisted, and the meanings and *limits* of the Christian church in which civic and political regimes, and individual agonies and desires are intertwined, remains an imperative area to study.

⁴⁰ My primary goal for this fieldwork was to get first-hand data about North Korean children in China. I was participating in the research team for North Korean Famine Relief which was associated with an NGO in South Korea, and was sponsored by a Korean research foundation, Asan Foundation, from 1998 to 2000. In order to meet the children, our team members asked South Korean Protestant Church networks in China to help us, because they were running and supporting many secret shelters and churches for North Korean migrants. In addition to the children, therefore, I was able to meet and talk with Korean-Chinese pastors, South Korean missionaries, North Korean adults, and North Korean young wanderers in China. This paper is based on experiences and feelings I had in the border area in 2000.

misuse of freedom, and thus I was not a complete authentic South Korean citizen. It was a challenging question and I finally attempted to defend myself by responding “I guess I have rights to be free from having a religion.” Soon after, I found myself regretting this response since Jiny’s eyes seemed to say that she was searching for a compelling response to make me give up and declare that I would begin attending church. During a moment of silence, catechist Choi proudly said (while rubbing Jiny’s head and back, an act of admiration on behalf of a senior person to his or her well-known younger counterpart) “Jiny is now an *almost perfectly born again* Christian.”

In this section I attempt to examine what Jiny meant by “religious freedom” and catechist Choi’s “almost born again Christian” statement in relationship to the Yanbian area. The concept of “religious freedom” demands consideration from many dimensions, from Jiny’s personal life trajectory to geopolitical environments surrounding North Korean migrants in China. Despite her unstable status as an illegal and thus vulnerable female migrant “hiding” in Ms. Choi’s small apartment, what does Christianity mean to her? How does having a religion become a banner of freedom and a form of authentic South Korean citizenship in her consciousness? Indeed, Jiny reminded me that the secret shelters I visited, where I met my interviewees, were all established and managed by Christian missionaries (Korean-Chinese or South Korean) who emerged as relatively new social agents affecting morality, aesthetics, and manners of everyday life in the Korean ethnic society in China in the era of global capitalism.

To understand the notion of “religious freedom”, which seems universal and taken-for-granted for most inhabitants of western style societies, we have to examine the processes and conditions that North Korean border crossers like Jiny have encountered

and encounter constantly. These processes engender a particular meaning of Christianity, which motivates such displaced people to have an alternative sense of belonging.

Borrowing from Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff's study on Christianity and colonialism in Africa, I position Protestant evangelism in the Sino-North Korean border area "as a problem in the interplay of power and meaning" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1986: 1). As for the notion of power, following Marx and Weber, Comaroff defines it as "the capacity to impose the conditions of being on others ... [involving] the incorporation of human subjects into the 'natural', taken-for-granted forms of economy and society" (1986: 2). It is thus hegemony, as they maintain, in place as the core analytical concept in both volumes of *Of Revelation and Revolution I* (1991) and *II* (1997).⁴¹ In the same vein, Foucault suggests "individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application, and the effects of power" (1994: 214), "in its more regional and local forms and institutions" (p.213). Accordingly, we could consider Jiny and her narratives as embodiments of power that were circulating at a particular space within which she was struggling to survive. By beginning with the examination of the multiple meanings of religious freedom, I argue that North Korean conversion to Christianity in the border area is a product of a "*dialectical* encounter" (Comaroffs 1997: 5, italics in the original) with macro and micro powers in such a particular geopolitical circumstance.

By beginning with Jiny's personal story that entails macro geopolitical upheavals taking place in Northeast Asia, I highlight the ways in which Christianity (or Church (jiàohuì) in local terms) emerges as a contested and ambivalent contact space; indeed, Christian churches were the most active institution helping North Korean border crossers

⁴¹ Hegemony is defined as "that order of sign and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies—drawn from a historically situated cultural field—that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 23).

in various ways in China. As I will depict, there are diverse forms of Christianity the border crossers experience and encounter. Beginning with Jiny's claim to Christian membership, I argue that it was a practice of her personal agency to submit herself to God and to the church community to which she "belonged" while simultaneously belonging to no state. While serving as a "safe shelter" literally and symbolically, Church entails a potential danger to migrants like Jiny in the event that they are arrested and sent back to North Korea. In North Korea, as meeting with a church or missionary is considered one of the most serious crimes, it carries with it a death penalty. If not arrested, however, Church serves as a socio-cultural institution where ethnic Koreans interact and encounter cultural differences and where North Korean migrants struggle to reconfigure their non-North Korean identities.

Crossing Life-Death River and Finding a Safe Haven

In recent years numerous activist reports have been published to raise awareness about North Korean "refugees" in China and beyond (e.g. Amnesty International *Report* (2007), International Crisis Group's *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond* (2006), Congressional Research Service's *North Korean Refugees in China and Human Rights Issues: International Response and U.S. Policy Options* (2007). Referring to the reports and my ethnographic fieldwork, for North Koreans, crossing the Sino-North Korean borderline is a matter of life and death. Based on my interviews and the South Korean government's survey data, the main reason North Koreans cross the Sino-Korean border is to seek food resources,⁴² and to seek a better life which is

⁴²The Reasons of Fleeing from North Korea (Survey in June, 2004. Ministry of Unification of South Korea)

described as being equivalent to the notions of “freedom” and “hope.” In contrast to the chronic poverty in North Korea, the area of northeast China is much wealthier and is known as the Yanbian area, the Korean-Chinese Autonomous Region. There are few geographical obstacles that block North Koreans from crossing the Sino-Korean border.

Like a majority of the border crossers, Jiny had a typical story: her family faced the agonies and hardships that many North Koreans underwent during the great famine, 1995–1998. One of her parents, her grandparents, and her siblings died of hunger. While the rest of the family members scattered to find food resources, she crossed the Tumen River, a natural borderline between China and North Korea, at night.

Christian churches provide food, clothes, and basic medical kits for the border crossers to pick up and return with to North Korea or travel to inland China (see I.C.G. 2006: 5). Some family units have relied on church support while moving around to avoid possible police raids. There are also secret shelters in remote mountainous areas far from villages, used for young people and families. In the urban areas, there are some small and inexpensive apartments that are used as shelters by churches. Jiny can be considered one of the luckier women in that she was able to find a safe shelter. The majority of North Korean women have been sold and worked in restaurants, the red light districts, at

	Difficulties in Living	Being worried of legal punishment	Anti- regime	Following other family members	For settling in China	Family conflicts	Others	Total
00	127	66	52	51	13	2	1	312
01	293	73	33	171	7	2	4	583
02	606	93	96	259	37	39	9	1,139
03	774	80	123	194	46	53	11	1,281
04	463	44	63	148	2	39	1	760
Total	2,263	356	367	823	105	135	26	4,075

karaoke bars, and in the emerging internet sex industry whose customers are predominantly South Korean males. Others are forced to marry Han-Chinese or Korean-Chinese men in rural areas. Jiny was also fortunate because catechist Choi was willing to take care of her. During the previous three years, Jiny had been staying with catechist Choi at her two-bedroom apartment where Jiny studied the Bible, prayed, learned Chinese, and heard about South Korea. She no longer worried about food, and her health was restored. While staying with catechist Choi, all living expenses were supported by Choi's church that had connections with South Korean and Korean Protestant churches overseas.⁴³

In this regard, Christianity served as her substantial exit and escape from biological suffering, from hunger, and facilitated her to have a "sense of belonging" and a feeling of cultural security by joining the Protestant Christian population that is likely to be seen as a universal community. Recent studies on diasporas and migration have discussed the emergence of "cultural citizenship" as a claim to live in ways different from the dominant norms of the host society (Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997; Fortier 2000; Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Hall 2003; Ong 1996; Rosaldo 1994). As a displaced person, Jiny needed to re-territorialize her identity in daily confrontations with the politically and culturally uncertain border zone. By entrusting herself to God and catechist Choi's care, she could fulfill her basic biological and cultural anxieties to survive in an urgent situation. Analytically, thus, I would like to suggest that she claimed "religious citizenship," which, however, is not synonymous with having the legal rights that one

⁴³ During the summer fieldwork in 2000, I went to the church every Sunday and met with a group of summer mission trips from a Korean-Canadian church, and a South Korean individual missionary who was seeking to bring single North Korean young men or women to secret chapels far away from the border area. The latter missionary told me that he was working to discipline and send North Korean young people back to the North as Christian missionaries.

could demand of a nation-state, but is a feeling of satisfaction available to illegal migrants that are floating on the thresholds of nation-state borderlines. In other words, her conversion to Christianity was both a practice of her “free will” and a strategy emerging from the negotiation of biological and cultural rights to survive in an insecure social environment.

Christianity and Human Rights

Christianity is invested with complex and even contradictory meanings for both North Korean migrants and international societies as well as South Korean Christian organizations working on the underground railroads. North Korean refugees were exposed to Christianity as a symbolic “means of western imperialism,” in the words of North Korean founder Kim Il-Sung. However, in the course of their Christian-supported stay in China and passage to South Korea, Christianity has come to represent freedom and democracy, and to serve as a vehicle through which they are exposed to the “South Korean Dream” of material prosperity and a middle-class Christian way of life (see Ong 2003; Weber 1963).

Due to its symbolic meaning (imperial invasion) when the undocumented North Korean migrants are arrested and sent back to the North, they are allegedly interrogated in a harsh manner as to whether they went to church, experienced Christianity, or met with a missionary. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) stresses in a recently published report, entitled *A Prison Without Bars* (2008), that based on interviews with former North Korean Security Agents they consider “the spread of Protestantism as a specific security threat and to assume that “South Korean

and American intelligence agencies” were behind its growth” (p. i6). Throughout my ethnographic research this has been echoed in similar testimonies from migrants and local pastors in the Sino-North Korean border area.

Due in part to the levels of potential persecution of those who are forcibly repatriated to North Korea, Christianity—that is likely to represent “freedom of religion” in western conventional consciousness— became a central matter in human rights debates in which international NGOs and other large powers are engaged. That is, compared to other immigrant laborers elsewhere, the issue of North Korean border crossers in China has always been politicized and tied to human rights issues in China and North Korea as well as nuclear weapon programs in North Korea. For instance, when the US Bush administration included the North Korean refugee issue as evidence of an “axis of evil,” it was to demonize the North Korean regime for both its human rights violations and its nuclear weapons development that is viewed as a potential cause of global instability. Some critics have stressed that the human rights issue in regards to North Korean migrants has likely been utilized in the context of political tensions of the surrounding nation-states (e.g. Chung B-h. 2004, and see USCIRF Report 2008, Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) Report 2008, CRS Report 2007, Crisis Group 2006, Hiroshi Kato 2008 for more interesting discourses of international human rights organizations regarding this issue).

The impacts of the political utilization of human rights issues reach into the migrants’ everyday lives in China. When the issue of migrants is publically raised and linked to human rights violations in China and North Korea, Chinese police increase shelter raids, arrests, and deportations; and the number of Chinese and North Korean

border guards is strengthened. Similarly, when “planned defections” (mostly organized by South Korean missionary groups like Durihana) took place in China, the North Korean migrants worried for their family that remained in China. The problem partly lies in the ongoing controversy surrounding the historical groundings of the human rights concept. In post-World War II history, there has generally been tension between the two sides of universalism and cultural particularism (see American Anthropological Association 1947, 1999; Asad 2003; Cohen 1989; Cowan et. al. 2001; Geertz 1984; Messer 1993; Wilson et. al. 2003; Roy 2001; Wikan 2002 for more debates on these in anthropological circles). The Chinese and North Korean sides maintain cultural particularism and national sovereignty over the border issues, while others (some civil societies, groups, and countries like those of the EU, the US, and anti-North Korean (Christian) organizations in South Korea and Japan) do so based on the contents of the UN Human Rights Declaration and the Refugee Convention and Protocol. The latter side has negotiated with China hoping to prevent it from deporting at least those who were seeking asylum by penetrating international facilities. It is claimed that China violates international laws although it has been a joint party in the Refugee Convention and Protocol since 1982 (see CRS Report 2007: 10, f. 31).

However, the Chinese government has never considered the undocumented North Koreans in China to be refugees but instead to be illegal border crossers. According to the joint Protocol on the border signed by North Korea and China in 1986, China sends all undocumented border crossers, if arrested, back to the North. It is well known that those forcibly repatriated individuals are imprisoned and receive penalties. North Korean law divides the illegal border crossers into two categories: the first being

illegal border crossing offense (*bibŏp kukkyŏng ch‘ulip joe*) and carries with it a relatively mild punishment (e.g. two years or less of hard labor) for those who went to China only seeking food resources, to visit relatives, or for small trading. The other category is that of national treason (*minjok panyŏkjoe*) if one attempted to penetrate an international facility, for example an embassy, to seek asylum, and often includes Christian converts as mentioned earlier (Compass Direct News 2009. 4.24). In this case, the punishment is severe. One can be sentenced to more than five years or even a lifetime of hard labor, or execution with property confiscation (*Segye ilbo* 2006.3.29).

In such complex geopolitical conditions, as Jiny distinguished South Korea from North Korea on the basis of freedom of religion, the Cold War legacy is still pervasively alive in the Sino-Korean border area.⁴⁴ It became a common trope for North Korean border crossers to describe their past life in the North as “not being free” under the socialist regime. As demonstrated in North Korean narratives, the Great Famine and its dreadful influence on their lives were all caused by the current North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il. Namely *Kimilsungism* was denied and some converted to Christianity which contains anticommunist capitalism as a form of particular Protestantism.

Until recently, most North Koreans staying in secret shelters often re-learned about their country while interacting with missionaries and cultural materials like Korean movies and commodities. They reconfigured the political view of their home country, North Korea, by means of South Korean cultural and political products that South Korean missionaries supplied and that were already popular in the area, along with “Korean

⁴⁴ Verdery, in her work “What was socialism, and What comes next?” addresses “the Cold War was also a form of knowledge and a cognitive organization of the world. It laid down the coordinates of a conceptual geography grounded in East vs. West and having implications for the further divide between North and South.” (Verdery 1996: 4)

Wave.” For instance, in 2000 I was asked several times by migrants whether I watched the South Korean fictional film that described a North Korean concentration camp. They suggested that I watch it because I would be able to actually feel the tragic realities of North Korea. The kinds of films watched by many North Korean migrants at shelters are well known in South Korea, called “anti-communism movies, *Pankong Yonghwa*.” These kinds of films have been periodically produced by the Minister of National Defense of South Korea, and played in military education classes as anti-communist propaganda. Not surprisingly, the shelters were a space in which the migrants began to watch their country from a viewpoint produced by the opposite side, that of South Korean anti-communist sentiment.

At the same time, the South Korean economic prosperity that is palpable and ubiquitous through various cultural products and satellite TV shows in the border area facilitates the migrants’ viewpoint “turnover”. Furthermore, religion is particularly tied to the powers of the modern state, and its ideologies, norms, and values that are translated and transplanted to those who are considered “Other.” Studying the relationship between Vietnamese migrants and the Mormon Church in the United States, Ong argues that Mormon Christianity as “an alternative modernizing force,” (Ong 2003: 227) plays a central role to acculturate these migrants to Mormon models that basically entail church superiority, male dominant gender hierarchy, a sense of American “freedom” away from family values, and the white race centered middle-class norm. What the migrants have been exposed to in Christian shelters is “an alternative modernizing force” that allowed them to interpret the difference between the North Korean political system and that of the South. This has mobilized them to accept specific meanings of “freedom,” and also

provided them with a sense of what South Korean life would and should look like. In their narratives, religion—specifically Christianity—is presented as a banner of freedom and democracy. Therefore, it is understandable that Jiny’s conversion to Protestantism was a spiritual and political vehicle for assimilating herself to a new world: a Protestant capitalist society.

However, we must recall the problem of illegal status that North Korean migrants have in China. We have acknowledged how unstable their everyday life is due to illegality and human rights tensions present in the Sino-North Korean border area. Under such insecure life conditions, although Christianity serves the migrants by giving them a new sense of belonging and substantial aid, these gestures are temporal and often instrumental. On the other hand, such temporality and instrumentality surrounding North Korean Christian experiences must be appreciated as the specific nature of Christianity that is imperative for the stateless migrants.

I continue by examining the changing forms of Christian shelters on which some desperate migrants rely, and the ways in which they come to seek what is called a perilous journey to palpable “freedom” and “hope” through a micro and confined “almost born again” (as said by Ms. Choi) conversion process.

CO-ETHNIC ASYMMETRY

This section is devoted to reviewing the church and secret shelter system, the logic of gender, and the thus complex and contradictory meanings of co-ethnic interactions among North Korean migrants, South Korean missionaries, and Korean-Chinese Christians. I use the term “asymmetry” in order to illuminate the ways in which

the migrants are positioned in a category of “rescue-subject” in evangelical humanitarian practices. The “rescue” theory and practice stem from the images of “exemplary victims” that are supposed to behave in helpless, obedient, sorrowful, weak, and poor ways. Their bodies must be skinny, older-looking (or younger-looking in the case of young adults), short, and often dirty. Their soul is also considered as one in need of purifying processes. Their conversion and understanding of the Bible are always suspected because evangelicals tend to think that the proselytizing from *Kimilsungism* to modern Christianity may be much more difficult than they expected.

Further, North Korean male masculinity is always a subject to be controlled, while females are portrayed as passive victims. I argue that the underlining mechanism of asymmetrical co-ethnic relations in secret shelter systems is a “well-founded fear of persecution” (Malkki 1996: 377) that the church and Christianity itself intrinsically generates in operating the shelters as its symbolic meaning (a means of imperial invasion) in the Sino-North Korean border area. At the end of the stories that take place in China, I want to show the case of North Korean mother-women in a Chinese family that I observed in a small rural village in China. This case examines the ways in which female partners of Chinese men and their local Korean-Chinese church rely on one another and thereby both negotiate a relatively better position in a Han-Chinese dominated family and ethnic system.

Fear and the Shelter System

The vast majority of secret shelters for North Korean border crossers are operated by transnational Korean churches and missionaries. In order for to better

historicize the characteristics of the Christian encounters in shelter systems experienced by North Korean border crossers, I begin with a review of the revival of Korean-Chinese Christianity initiated by the late-1970s Chinese economic reform and rapidly accelerated by material and manpower investments of the South Korean Church.

Protestantism had been very active among ethnic Koreans in Northeast China since the early 20th century. Its leadership had led nationalist enlightenment movements as well as independence movements against imperial Japan by the end of World War II. Throughout the Cultural Revolution that took place in China during the 1960–70s, however, Korean-Chinese who had been granted a “model minority” status closed all the churches by themselves. While the former East European socialist countries domesticated religious practices (see Hann et. al. 2006) and the Chinese government officially let patriotic Protestant churches remain under its control, local people recalled that Christian/religious practice was extinct even in “private” sectors in both the Korean-Chinese community and in North Korea around that time.

Since the early 1980s, South Korean missionaries have put forth tremendous effort in supporting the rise of Korean-Chinese Christianity in the Yanbian Korean-Chinese Autonomous Prefecture where 48 percent (850 thousand) of the entire population is ethnic Koreans (2 million nationwide). Over the past twenty years, it is reported that almost all Korean villages came to have their own churches, whether a house church or a registered Three-Self Patriotic Movement church.⁴⁵ Roughly 8 percent of ethnic Koreans (approximately 120 thousand) identify themselves as Christian, more

⁴⁵ House church means an unregistered church of a small size having less than twenty or so members in the congregation. In the title of Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) church, the term “three-self” means self-support (自立), self-government (自傳) and self-propagation (自養), and this three-self movement is to promote these principles within the Protestant church in China. In this respect, outsiders tend to consider that the Chinese registered Church is controlled by the Chinese socialist government.

than the 5 percent of Han-Chinese and 3 percent of other ethnic minorities.⁴⁶ In Korean-Chinese society, Church emerged as a co-ethnic contact zone in which South Korean missionaries, Korean-Chinese (since the 1980s), and North Korean border crossers came to interact with each other since the mid-1990s.

It is still the case, however, that China is a socialist country and perpetuates its control over the “religious market.” In particular, South Korean missionary activities in the Yanbian area are highly monitored and restricted for national security reasons. The rules that foreign missionaries are required to follow are not very complicated: simply that they are neither allowed to lead regular church worships, nor to perform religious activities (e.g. singing, praying, and distributing literature) in public spaces such as on the street or in the squares. As elsewhere, the majority of South Korean missionaries tended to hide their identities and acted as enterprisers, educators, or tourists. Within the nature of this “half-open” religious market, the North Korean mission is aimed at both the border crossers and North Korea as part of what the South Korean church calls the Northward mission (*Pukpang sŏn'gyo*).

Despite the structural obstacles of state surveillance, church served as a stage for a somewhat romantic reunion of ethnic Koreans in the Sino-North Korean border area.⁴⁷ It had long been dreamed in a Korean nationalist sentiment. South Korean evangelists enthusiastically moved up to the area and devoted themselves to reviving Christianity as

⁴⁶ Refer to a Korean web document written by Park P.-d., a Korean missionary, at the Society for World Internet Mission (SWIM) <http://china.swim.org>.

⁴⁷ Evangelizing North Korea and North Korean migrants becomes the first and foremost mission in South Korean Christianity. Christianity Today reported that “Christians in South Korea have been among the first to help families in the North.” Regarding the fact that they compete to establish secret shelters in China and to aid North Korea in a direct way, I recall a sensitive issue of ““humanitarian” philanthropies [that] served the vital imperial function” (Thorne 1999: 242).

they believed it was “God’s calling.” More than any others, these missionaries are radicals with a strong South Korean-centric ethnic nationalism. Because of such South Korean-centric evangelism, in reality the tri-cornered relations turned out to be asymmetrical in terms of legal status (state citizenship), class (economic prosperity and capitalist values), and spiritual legitimacy (limits of conversion). These three elements intertwined with each other seem to persistently haunt North Korean Christian passage to and in South Korea or beyond. In most settings, North Korean migrants were situated at the bottom of the relationship, which on one hand is stratified and hierarchical. On the other, it is accompanied by negotiations and contestations in both macro and micro levels of interactions. At the same time, the restrictions and limits imposed on the migrants in turn motivated them to keep pursuing physical and social relocations, namely their journey for freedom and hope.

Operating a secret shelter or safe house for North Korean border crossers demanded special techniques and strategies. One of the preferred ways was that Korean-Chinese Christians took care of North Korean border crossers directly, while South Korean missionaries supervised the shelters or churches through providing finances and needed supplies. This type of mission strategy was reasonable to ensure safety. If a shelter was raided by police, both Korean-Chinese and South Korean missionaries could be released by paying fines or bribes to avoid return to the North. With the exception of some bolder missionaries such as Pastor Chun from Durihana, which has been introduced to international societies through documentary films (*Seoul Train*, 2003), not many South Korean missionaries have directly worked at either the underground railroads or secret shelters.

The shelter operation system in which the primary caregiver is Korean-Chinese has also been associated with a cultural bias or assumption on behalf of the South Korean Church. That is, it was a commonly held view that the degrees of cultural differences (language, ways of thinking, behaving, human relationship building, and so forth) between Korean-Chinese and North Koreans may be smaller than those between South and North Koreans, because they have gone through socialist societies. Korean-Chinese catechists played the role of local agents supervised by South Korean missionaries. There were and are some shelters in remote mountain areas far from villages that are predominantly North Korean, managed by themselves under their own leader, visited by a South Korean missionary once a week or more. As elsewhere and in traditional church communities, the way that secret shelters are operated reflected the hierarchical relationship established in missionary fields (see Orta 2004).

This asymmetrical relationship extended to the point at which North Korean belief was measured not by God, but by South Korean missionaries or Korean-Chinese Christians in a secret shelter setting: a specific space governed by strict rules, secrets, and structured fear.⁴⁸ “First and foremost, they need to change their brain (*kol*).” Mr. Song began with the biological term, *kol*, which North Koreans use to indicate the head: “I have headache (*kol ap ‘ŭda*),” or mentality, “That guy looks insane (*kol i isanghan kŏt katda*).” In his account, the body and mentality “is completely contaminated by *Kimilsungism*. Until the *kol* is replaced, nothing is possible.” As a green card-holding

⁴⁸ In 2000, I visited all kinds of secret shelters in and around Yenji, China. In 2007, however, because of increasing Chinese police control, I was not able to make a single visit to a secret shelter whether in an urban area or mountain area. Instead, my local informants who were caring for or aiding North Koreans arranged meeting places and times for me.

South Korean-American missionary in his late 50s, he decisively gave his opinion about North Korean migrants in China. For years he had been running his “own” shelters about an hour away from Yenji, China, which was a rare occurrence in 2007 as the Beijing Olympics approached. As a localized missionary, he was similar to a Korean-Chinese middle-aged man, habitually smoking and drinking. In the middle of a mountain those who he called “my kids” (who were in fact adults) might maintain an ascetic life, like a group of monks. His men and women resided in separate houses about thirty minutes on foot from each other. As his metaphor of “my kids” indicated, the relationship between him and his North Korean care receivers was that of a family patriarch. Nonetheless he did not fully expect, but highly doubted as to whether his “kids” could wipe Juche ideology from their “brain” and assimilate into a capitalist society.

His account reminded me of another South Korean pastor I met in 2000. He also expressed his opinion on North Korean migrants with academic evidence: “I surveyed five hundreds of North Korean migrants in secret shelters. Based on data, I became to conclude that converting North Koreans to Christianity would be impossible, as far as they tend to say that the Bible is very easy to understand if Jesus is replaced with Kim Il-Sung.” Assuming that I was a missionary, he ultimately advised me against ambitions of evangelizing North Korean border crossers, but to only serve them in a humanitarian way. Mr. Song and this pastor were ultimately convinced that Juche ideology was embodied intrinsically in North Korean subjects, so that their spiritual transformation would be almost impossible.

On the other hand, Korean-Chinese catechists tended to appreciate North Koreans’ accounts of the Bible. A male catechist who was caring for people in the shelter

in the mountain area said, “They [North Koreans in his shelter] are good at understanding Bible. I guess it is because Kim Il-Sung is considered as the sacred father and worshiped like God.” I have also been told on several occasions at secret shelters that “I was first hesitant to read Bible which is written in very small characters. But shortly after reading line by line, it was as if I was reading our North Korean textbook. The series of unreal miracles, Jesus love to his disciples and the poor, the way that the writers cite what Jesus said and acted, and so on led me to think ‘wow, it’s just what I have learned and practiced in my entire life in our republic (*konghwaguk*).”

For South Korean Christians, it is nonsense, even unthinkable, to compare Kim Il-sung with Jesus. While North Korean adults tended to struggle to integrate what they have learned (Juche ideology) with what they are learning (Bible), South Korean missionaries were unlikely to accept such a rationalization process. For Korean-Chinese Christians, playing the mediator role between the two sides as well as serving as the primary caregiver for the northerners, as Ms. Choi expressed, North Korean conversion to Christianity seems always “almost.” This “almost born again” trope suggests that North Korean spiritual transformation is more or less conceived of as less authentic and less complete in China. (This set of ambiguous interpretations is imperative to further discussion about the meanings of “true” Christianity between North Korean Christians and their southern counterparts in South Korea. I will focus on this issue in the next chapter.)

Can one say that South Korean missionary work is authorized as ideal Christianity in Northeast China? Although South Korea is the country that sends out the second largest amount of Christian missionaries, it faced a series of criticisms about

“ugly” Korean missionaries (borrowing from James Brain’s “The Ugly Americans Revisited” (2006)). First, South Korean national evangelism has often been criticized and has generated problems. A Chinese local government official has allegedly accused the missionaries of being a national security threat as they have provoked the Korean-Chinese population with slogans like “Northeast China is the land of our [Korean] ancient kingdom of *Koguryŏ*,” or “Let’s unite all parts of Manchuria and Korean peninsula with Gospel.” Such South Korean-centric evangelist approaches have been empowered by financial capability as some missionaries are supported by their mother church in South Korea.

The prior list of criticisms may also be seen as the characteristics of local Protestant churches, and it is a legacy that is likely to persist. For example Mr. Kwon, a local Korean-Chinese pastor, repeatedly criticized South Korean missionaries who trained catechists in their own homes: “They only rose followers’ eye point up to a South Korean middle-class life style. The catechists after finishing the training here do not want to go out to the urban poor brothers and sisters, although we are destined to serve them.”⁴⁹ According to him, most South Korean missionaries who were sent from their mother church tended to work by themselves with little cooperation with local churches and went back to the South after a few years.⁵⁰ They invited local Christians to their house and had them taste “modern civilization” while training them as potential catechists. Mr. Kwon’s criticism is reminiscent of the colonial legacy of western missionary work that has been pointed out in postcolonial studies circles as well as in

⁴⁹ Interviews conducted in the summer of 2007 in China.

⁵⁰ As mentioned earlier, South Korean missionaries tend to have thought of Korean-Chinese local churches as being less authentic but as something of state propaganda, if registered. This trend has changed in recent years since the local Korean-Chinese anti-South Korean missionary sentiment increases in opposition to the ever-growing South Korean dream and Korean Wave.

Ong's 2003 work.

North Korean border crossers under church or shelter care were not fully free to speak their thoughts, criticisms, or their feelings. Adults could resist by simply leaving, and in the extreme, reporting the location of the shelter to the police. In order to preserve shelter safety, North Koreans were required to obey the caregiver and leader's orders and follow the daily schedule very strictly. Shelters for young adults in an urban area had stricter rules. A South Korean anthropologist, Byung-Ho Chung (2005) described a shelter as follows:

“July 2004, in an ordinary looking 3-bedroom apartment on the 6th floor in Yenji, China, eight boys and one girl live quietly almost invisible even to next door neighbors. A 19 year old boy, name Hyun from Heoryong, has been staying in this secret shelter for 5 years. He crossed the Sino-Korean border in January 1999 when the famine in North Korea was extremely severe.

He and his friends wake up at 4:30 every morning for their first daily routine –an hour and half long “dawn-prayer.” It goes on until 6:00 and after breakfast, clean-up, and a short break, they continue with a three-hour-long morning bible-study until lunch-time. In the afternoon, they resume their bible-studies, occasionally learning survival Chinese which they never get a chance to practice in the shelter. After dinner, an “evening-prayer” follows and they are tested on the daily memorization of bible verses. It usually takes about three hours. They all go to bed at 9:30.”

This 19-year-old man had never left the apartment room during the past six months. Chung asserts, in their imagination about outside North Korea and China, “America becomes their dreamland, much hated Japan becomes a country that is livable, and going to South Korea is seen as a viable option” (Chung B-h. 2003: 208). In other words, the conversion of North Koreans is associated with a newly imagined world order in which utopian capitalist societies take over their past lives in North Korea. North Korean migrant conversion is intermingled not only with personal anxiety to survive and a desire for a sense of belonging, but also institutional propaganda to expand its power in

a particular space at a specific time. This is what I call the politics of South Korean Protestant capitalism that is affiliated with anti-North Korean and anti-communist sentiment, and in many cases, with pro-Americanism.⁵¹

Uncontrollable Men and Victim Women

The North Korean migrant population in China and elsewhere is gendered in non-North Korean discourses and practices. Migrants in shelters and churches are part of a gendered space as well, one that in its long history has largely relied on a patriarchal system (see Chong K. 2006). It is not merely a matter of the size of the male and female population, but rather a gendered ethnicization of the population (cf. Choo H-y. 2006)

As Choo Hae-yoon points out, the bipolar image that describes North Korean men as violent, emotional, stubborn, and Confucian; and North Korean women as fragile and vulnerable victims of human trafficking, is dominant. However North Korean men's masculinity was never supposed to exceed that of the Korean-Chinese caregivers in a shelter and the South Korean missionary authority in the border area in general. A micro technology employed to manage male individuals or family unit shelters was that the Korean-Chinese caregiver subjugated the strongest man, who then took a leader position among the care receivers. In this process of reordering Korean co-ethnic relationships, North Korean male masculinity seems persistently to become an object that should be controlled, disciplined, and the North Korean male subject thus demasculinized. This tendency further extends to their assimilation processes in South Korea.

⁵² As for these kinds of characteristics of South Korean Protestantism, see Chung-Shin Park's "Protestantism and politics in Korea."

Another strategy for better shelter management was to rely on a Confucian family system, which was likely familiar to both North Koreans and Korean-Chinese, and was thus encouraged and stimulated based on securing shelter safety. One of the stereotypes circulating about Korean-Chinese traits is that of a stronger Confucian patriarchy than in the Han-Chinese. North Korean family and gender relations are thus a product of both their home country tradition and local specificity.

As for North Korean women in relation to the Christian mission or their local church, the gender issue is complicated according to the circumstances of each individual. Although a vast majority of North Korean women who have been living in China for some time were sold and resold as brides or sex workers, some local churches take risks to minister to those women. Unlike some South Korean Christian NGOs working to rescue these women from China, in 2007 I witnessed some local Korean-Chinese churches shifting their care-giving purpose to mobilize those who married local grooms to live in the status quo. Even a US-based NGO was seeking a better way to make North Korean “mothers” stay in China instead of taking them on the “Seoul train.” These cases may deserve more discussion, but I will briefly describe the case of North Korean “mothers” in a Korean-Chinese church located in a rural village around two hundred miles north from the Sino-North Korean border line.

According to pastor Chang, the village consisted of 99 percent Han-Chinese, around 0.8 percent of Korean-Chinese, and 0.2 percent of other ethnic minorities, and the number of North Korean brides was once twenty five or so. His church provided dawn and evening prayers every day. When I attended an evening prayer after sunset, the

number of attendants was around fifteen, the majority of them being women, about half were older and half younger. Children played in the front yard of the church, and the young women were all from North Korea and had married farmers in the village.

Before the evening meeting while giving me a ride from the city bus terminal to the village, pastor Chang asked me not to say anything positive about North Korean migrants in South Korea. He said that five North Korean women in and around his village ran away in the past several years and thus villagers did not like to have South Korean visitors. The runaway women were all “allured” by a South Korean missionary, called Pastor Kim. With a little anger Chang said “That guy seems to be considered as a hero among South Korean Christian activists, but here in my village, he is a bad guy who betrayed me and destroyed families.” Chang frankly added that he also once respected him. But the consequence of his missionary work was miserable for the children and the family left behind. When the North Korean women “ran away” (*tomang gada*), some promised to send an invitation letter so that her husband and child could come to South Korea; others just ran away with all the money leaving the child behind. In his account, colored from a local point of view, this human rights rescue activity and the North Korean women’s “perilous journey” for freedom became a crime of family destruction and a heartless and selfish escape.

Such cases of runaway brides brought another consequence to the village. That is, once “violent” husbands and family members began treating North Korean brides much better to keep them in their own family and within the village boundary. As described in the previously mentioned human rights reports, most women are exposed to chronic physical abuse and labor exploitation in China. A short life story by Sook, a woman in

her mid 30s who I met after evening prayer, was one of the examples of some of the experiences undergone by North Korean brides. Sook had been a victim of domestic violence and recounted “They [her first husband’s family] treated me like an animal, actually worse than an animal.” It was very painful for her to recall the past memories, in particular while her current husband was present (she was a little hesitant to narrate her story in detail, but soon it became a religious conversion testimony). Her story was not the first time, however, that I have heard North Korean women in South Korea describe their treatment in China as “we were worse than animal (*chimsŭng-poda mothan*).”

This village that I stayed in at the time handled the legal status of the North Korean women and their half North Korean and half Chinese children. According to an agreement between the city police department and the village headman, all North Korean women can live in the village but are required to pay a seasonal registration fee (about 400RMB Chinese currency, approximately \$58) every three months. Moreover, their half North Korean and half Chinese children can be registered as legal Chinese residents under their father’s family line. The particular case of this village was not officially reported to its provincial government, but operated as a hidden local policy within its regional sovereignty.

Although one may find that this village is a unique example of trying to improve the conditions of North Korean women moreso than in other places in China, what needs to be considered is that the dominantly Han-Chinese village claimed their North Korean women as property that they had bought through the marriage market, and so the registration fee is seen as a property tax. This localized case is a product of Han-Chinese male dominant gender hierarchy in the frame of extended family structure. Despite

having some degree of a better status, North Korean women's freedom was continually restricted—they must be within a Chinese family as well as remain within a certain territorial boundary.

While these women were “mothers” in relation to their children, they were situated in a more complex position given the reality of their living situation. A woman named Myung-sun explained why during our conversation outside with pastor Chang, her 9-year old daughter kept coming into the yard and peaking from the windows: “She is really afraid if I would run away all of a sudden leaving her behind.” “Have you ever tried before?” I asked. “Well, my daughter has never let me stay alone. At night, when sleeping she wakes up from time to time and check that I am with her, and even sometimes she ropes her leg and mine.” Although she did not respond directly to my question, her account implied that she had attempted to escape, which was understandable given her living conditions. She was living in a thatched-roof house in which there were two small bedrooms with a tiny kitchen and one dirt stable. Except for a TV set which was the newest household item, all the surfaces were uneven; the thatched-roof looked as if it would fall down with a single heavy rain in the upcoming summer season; the mud walls were patched with all different kinds of papers such as magazines and school texts, and had small and large cracks from top to bottom. Even the floor we were sitting on and where she would sleep with her daughter was bumpy.

Her wrinkled face and gray hairs indicated that she might be more advanced in age, but in reality we were the same age. She was considered to be the most valuable asset that her husband, his father, and two younger brothers had obtained by spending all the money they had and by borrowing from relatives some ten years prior. Since then, she

was expected to reproduce this family and had a daughter. According to Chinese law at the time, she was allowed to only have one child. Over the past five years after paying all the debts, thanks to her management, she took the position as house accountant and saved enough money to renovate the house. However, just several months before, she was able to contact her family in North Korea for the first time in years and sent them financial assistance:

“I didn’t come to China only for myself, but for my family members left in North Korea (*Chosun*). For the first time, I finally reached my family and knew that they were in a desperate situation. So I sent some, actually, a lot of money that I have. I didn’t tell my family that. If they would know, I may be...”

As always, the future was uncertain and insecure for her. She was the mother of a daughter and the daughter of her mother who was then sick, starved, and fragile. Now her life burden was multiplied by her intention to take care of her North Korean family, who were only looking for her financial support.⁵² As a powerless and stateless migrant, her mundane position was extremely marginalized when coupled with transnational family obligations. Her devotion to church activities can be understood in terms of a human agency in the context of this set of life-long agonies.

Illegal or limited status, chronic poverty, hard labor, domestic violence, trafficking, deportation, imprisonment, sexual/physical abuse, family obligations to both a current Chinese family and those in North Korea, and much more are the circumstances

⁵² In fact, I felt that she was asking me for help, but the field regulation was changed. Namely, for a temporal visitor like me, it was not recommended to offer actual cash directly to North Korean care receivers to whom s/he was introduced by a local caregiver like pastor Chang. I was introduced to pastor Chang’s church by a bigger church pastor, Kwon, in Yenji, who was sponsoring Chang’s church. So I was supposed to donate to pastor Kwon who requested that I not give anything to Chang in person. The way that pastor Kwon was taking care of a sister church, Chang’s church, represented a changing way in managing a shelter in the area. In the same vein, when I met with North Korean individuals through another local informant organization, I was required not to give cash but only a gift or meal to the interviewees.

that most North Korean women have been undergoing for years in China. Such structural conditions and moral burdens aggravate their marginal position.

It was interesting to witness that the term “escape” or *tomang* has been used as means for both Chinese and North Korean women to maintain their status quo in the village where Sook and Myung-sun were living. Myung-sun and pastor Chang noted that all adults tended to say “Your mother may run away (*tomang ganda*)” as a way to stop and prevent a child from engaging in naughty behaviors. It was also used by the women as a grave threat or warning for their husbands. In particular, as to church-going, Myung-sun was allowed to attend church regularly by threatening her husband by saying, “If you won’t allow me to go, I’ll run away.”

Chang’s church was thus serving as an ethnic shelter for North Korean women away from Chinese family and poverty, and as a playground for their children without disturbing their mothers’ church activities. Just as most ethnic churches or religious facilities elsewhere function to negotiate their ethnic identities and practice cultures (see Guest 2005; Jeung 2005; Leonard 2005; Ong 1996, 2003; Yang 1999 for the relationship between religion and migrant identities), in this small Korean ethnic church North Korean and Korean-Chinese state identities were integrated as the same ethnic Korean identity different from that of Han-Chinese. Yet it does not mean the Korean ethnicity is monolithic. Instead, it is relational and negotiable.

While the half Chinese and half North Korean children were registered in the Han-Chinese family register in which their North Korean mother was absent, ethnic Koreans in the village also claimed the children as Korean descendants for the purpose of a church scholarship to study at a Korean ethnic school in the city.

In addition to the renegotiation of ethnic belonging, for the women, church served as a way to manipulate family hierarchy. It is likely different from a model used by Kelly Chong (2005) that sheds light on South Korean women's reintegration into South Korean patriarchic family structure through conversion to Christianity and devotion to church activities. No other alternatives are available as a way to resist Chinese masculinity than church-going for the mother-women, except for actual running away. In China, church-going has a particular connotation associated with it. Although Christianity is rapidly rising among young people in China (especially in urban areas) (E. Osnos; 2008, *Chicago Tribune*, June 22), there has been mainstream prejudice against attending church: "Most Han-Chinese people here in this village think that church is a place to go for only elderly or the disabled, not normal persons," said pastor Chang. According to the mainstream Chinese consciousness, church is a space for the abnormal, the weak, the poor—and to an extent, the female—in opposition to "normal" and "proper" modern citizens.

In rural areas, this legacy of the Cultural Revolution still seems pervasive. As Chang's church displayed its slogan "God center, Words center, Church center" on the top of the altar, some North Korean women dared to put church activity before their housework. Similarly, Sook's husband finally converted to Christianity and like a shadow always followed Sook in fear of her potential escape.

I witnessed similar cases at a Korean-Chinese church in Yenji, which supported that some North Korean women, wives and/or mothers, married to Han- or Korean-Chinese men, were more likely to be confident in and positive about appropriated structural conditions—in particular, the family hierarchy and Chinese masculinity to

which they had been subjugated. Yet it is worth pointing out that the women I met with who exposed their identity as North Koreans to church authorities were all very poor and relying on support for rent, food, childcare, employment, and so forth. At the same time, North Koreans in urban areas are all very vulnerable, at times more than the rural women in the villages, due to their illegal status (with the exception of those who had an expensive fake resident card). Thus, the degree of human agency North Korean women could practice through church must be seen as the one that is available in an extremely marginalized and liminal situation.

For the women, gaining a little more power in appropriating Chinese male dominant family relations through church serves as a means to “agentively submit” (Mahmood 2001) themselves in the asymmetrical co-ethnic relationship with South Korean missionaries and Korean-Chinese caregivers (e.g. pastors and catechists) in China. This is due in part because of the actual practice of “runaway” that is made more realistic through the church. It is also due to the asymmetrical nature of the relationship that tends to stimulate the migrants to long for the better life in South Korea that they feel they were promised.

CONCLUSION

Beginning with the first episode of Christian contact zones, I have examined the ways in which North Korean migrants experience different forms of Christianity, which in turn contribute to their imagination of and migration to South Korea. I first presented Jiny’s rhetoric of “religious freedom,” where the local church served as a cultural and substantial shelter for Jiny in which she was born again under catechist Ms. Choi’s care. Bringing religion and claim to religious membership into the human rights discourses in

which states and international regimes are involved, I have highlighted that church played a role in reshaping North Korean knowledge and sense of belonging by adopting pro-capitalist views in association with a South Korean anti-communist Protestantism. Further, this changing worldview and desire for a more secure yet secular membership mobilized the migrants to pursue this-worldly freedom.

In the second part, I have approached a micro level of interactions in Christian contact zones. I observed a hierarchical relationship among North Korean migrants, Korean-Chinese Christians, and South Korean missionaries, and the relationship was stratified according to each nation's economic level. To some extent North Korean religiosity was likely to be "measured" and further hardly qualified according to such asymmetrical structures of co-ethnic relations. I also reconsidered the ways in which North Korean male masculinity was objectified as one in need of being repressed for the sake of shelter safety. I posed a question that it might be understood as a means to subjugate and "otherize" North Korean masculinity within the inter-Korean ethnic male hierarchy resembling church order. In the same vein, I attempted to reconsider North Korean female victim theory in light of the structural and moral burdens that such marginalized mother-women were carrying out. For married North Korean women, church-going had multiple meanings as well as inherent limits. I introduced the ways in which church served as a means and end for some married women to manipulate Chinese male dominant family structure, yet while submitting themselves to asymmetrical inter-Korean relationship as well as to church hierarchy. Ultimately, this chapter aimed to contextualize what brought the migrants to undertake such a perilous journey to freedom with respect to the processes of their identity reconfiguration in transnational Christianity.

There have been criticisms and self-reflections within and beyond Christian communities regarding the ways South Korean Christianity works on certain issues. Kato Hiroshi, executive director of Life Funds for North Korean Refugees (LFNKR), recently presented at an international conference held on April 2, 2008 in Korea. In his presentation, he posed a question to the ways in which “Some Korean NGOs supported by Christian churches in South Korea impose conditions on North Korean refugees when deciding which ones to help and protect” (Hiroshi 2008: 6). As I agree with his points (which need further discussion) I quote the parts in which he continued to address his criticism as follows:

For example, people who have more successfully achieved the assignments given to them by pastors or missionaries receive tickets to third countries sooner. Specific conditions that North Korean refugees must meet if they are to qualify include the following:

- 1) Does he/she have enough money (3000RMB in Chinese currency) to travel to their destination third country?
- 2) If he/she does not have money, does he/she go to a Christian church in China and eagerly engage in morning and evening prayer services?
- 3) Does he/she attend the Bible study meetings to deepen their understanding of the Bible?
- 4) Can he/she actually demonstrate a pattern of giving to the church in China?
- 5) If he/she wishes to settle in South Korea, will they promise to donate 10% of his/her income once settled in South Korea?

The North Korean refugees have no alternative. They must obey the dictates of South Korean pastors or missionaries while they are in China because they need the church's help to hide from Chinese police. If they fail to obey, they are very likely to be ushered out of the shelters. Since they are in such a vulnerable position, they frequently have to obey against their will.

Korean pastors complain that North Korean refugees are enthusiastic Christians while they are in China, but they quit coming to churches after they make it to South Korea. This is no surprise. Most of the refugees had to choose to be Christians in order to survive in China. Thus, they often lose interest once they reach a free society. Unless anyone chooses to be a believer in any religion, of their own free will, it constitutes forced belief. This violates their freedom to believe as their conscience guides them, and it also violates their human rights.

What was missing in his presentation above, however, is a view that sees how such vulnerable, powerless refugees negotiate “tickets to a third country,” and why it should be considered a “forced belief” instead of a particular form of religious practice. North Korean Christians continue on their ways to settle down in South Korea. Thus, in order to answer these questions, I will move on to their Christian experiences in the South Korean church with respect to how I understand their narratives and practices.

CHAPTER 4

THE STATE OF FREEDOM: REGULAR CITIZENS, CELEBRATED CONVERTS

“Why do they keep coming to our country? There are people dying of hunger here. They just receive our tax,” said a man who was sitting right next to our table at the restaurant to his friend. The TV was broadcasting that a group of North Koreans was arriving at the Incheon international airport. I found myself shaking with anger and wanting to yell at him. But I felt too terrible to do so.
-Kumhee’s Journey: From Aoji to Seoul 7,000km, 2007: 213-4 (my translation)

This chapter examines the ways in which the North Korean migrants are silenced in the state domain, while they are celebrated on the altar of church in South Korea. After they arrive in South Korea, the government’s “humanitarian” settlement program mobilizes them to be “regular citizens” and to assimilate into South Korean society—humanitarian systems silence the migrants in public. Indeed, the very de-politicized state diagnosis tends to engender identity crisis among the new migrants, in particular during the initial period. In the meantime, it is within the church where some migrant converts appear in public as born again “God’s warriors” to testify their Christian passage in biblical language. I maintain that the migrants’ identity construction processes must be analyzed in this competing political “market” situation.

Both the government and the church position the migrants in an imagined unified nation. In other words, the newcomers are projected to live up to such an imaginary world, or “imagined community” as Benedict Anderson (1983) calls it. Both intend for and expect the migrants to be model first-generation unifiers, yet the directions are a little different. Then, how do they negotiate their collective and individual identities in this ideologically and politically complex predicament? In light of the migrants’ identity in an imagined nation, I take inspiration from the concept of “figured worlds” in *Identity and*

Agency in Cultural Worlds by Dorothy Holland et al. (1998),⁵³ which “rest[s] upon people’s abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized ‘as if’ realms. ... People’s identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically in these ‘as if’ worlds” (Holland et al. 1998:49). While still being positioned in an increasingly competitive capitalist society in which they are all expected to assimilate, it is a culturally and historically figured unified nation, or Christianized kingdom, for which they are either silenced or narrating. I argue that within these “webs of power linked to nation-state and civil society” (Ong 1996:738), however, they tend to remain as “Other” situated in a virtual world (cf. Chung B-h 2008; Kim Y-s; 2004; Suh J-j. 2002; Yoon Y-s. 2002).

I divide this chapter into two parts: the first examines the initial period of the migrants’ settlement process in the government institutions. I shed light on this stage as an intensive threshold period in which the Korean government humanitarian unification policy can be well viewed. The second part embarks on analyzing North Korean Christian conversion narratives in church. Having gained a voice, a specific biblical language, the migrant converts “perform” life transition, which is both an interior transformation and a physical relocation.

IMF CRISIS, SUNSHINE POLICY, AND “NEW SETTLERS”

“The purpose of this Act is to provide such matters relating to protection and support as are necessary to help North Korean residents escaping from the area North of the Military Demarcation Line (hereinafter referred to as “North Korea”) and desiring protection from the Republic of Korea, as quickly as possible to adapt themselves to, and settle down in, all spheres of their lives, including political, economic, social and cultural spheres.”

⁵³ This volume is part of “cultural studies of the person” (p.6) based on theories of L. S. Vygotsky and M. M. Bakhtin.

(Article 1 (Purpose), Act on the Protection and Settlement Support of Residents escaping from North Korea)

In recent years, the South Korean government settlement support system has shifted its main purpose from “protection” to “focusing on capacity building for independence rather than on material support” (Suh J-j. 2002: 71). The notions of self-support (*chahwal*) and self-reliance (*charip*) emerged as the main goal of the system that is designed as part of long-term plans for nation unification. The Ministry of Unification began dealing with North Korean migrant issues as humanitarian concerns (*indojŏk munje*). The newcomers from the North are the only group distinctively receiving a special package of benefits including legal and social supports from the state that in some degree are restricted to other Korean diasporas, such as Korean-Chinese, Koreans from the former Soviet Union, and Korean-Japanese.⁵⁴ This is a result of the policy that deals with the issue of migration strictly within the frame of national unification. This part examines the ways in which the government humanitarian project “silences” the migrants for the purpose of normalizing an inter-Korean relationship in a changing politico-economic context.

When the mid-to-late 1990s natural disasters devastated the North with a great famine that killed anywhere from one to three million people, South Korea was facing the so-called IMF Crisis in 1997. Survey data showed that over 80 percent of the South Korean population expected the newly elected President Kim Dae-jung (DJ), a former

⁵⁴ These Korean diasporas are those whose massive migrations first took place under the Japanese colonial force and their lives as ethnic minorities were also influenced by the Cold War. Since the Korean War (1950-1953), the number of other emigrant groups and individuals as laborers to Germany, the US, Middle-East countries, Latin America countries, and etc. increased as the developmental state mobilized. Also, hundreds of thousands of children were sent as adoptees to the Western countries since the War and during the industrialization period. The number of Korean diasporic populations is approximately 6.8 million across the world in 2009 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2009).

dissident against the past authoritarian regimes, to give priority to overcoming the crisis while only 2 percent of the people were concerned with national reunification (Paik H-s. 2009: 283, f.14).

But Kim DJ blended the two tasks as a means to break through the crisis. According to the IMF standard, the DJ regime began promoting the neoliberal reforms in the financial and business sectors in Korea, and simultaneously promoted the normalization of an inter-Korean relationship. It was the “Sunshine Policy,”⁵⁵ aimed at achieving peace on the Korean peninsula, in favor of overcoming the debt crisis at a rapid pace. It also opened up an era of neoliberal post-division South Korea. While putting enormous efforts on the normalization of inter-Korean relationships, the DJ administration launched a new support system for the growing number of North Korean newcomers. Stated simply, the DJ regime accepted all North Koreans who wanted to come to the South via a third country, but depoliticized the issue. That was much improved over the previous Kim YS regime that selectively received the migrants (see chapter 1). Based on the Act enacted in 1997, the Hanawon (House of Unity) was established in January of 1999 as a government settlement center operated by the Ministry of Unification. By beginning with an examination of the government-controlled initial settlement process of the migrants upon their arrival in the South, I will elaborate

⁵⁵ Paik Hak-soon (2009) stresses that the Sunshine Policy stems from Kim Dae-jung’s three principles of reunification—independence, peace, and democracy. And his ideal form of a reunified nation is one nation, one state, and two regional governments. Kim DJ’s idea however, is not distinctive but seen as the one succeeding the previous Kim Young-sam regime whose unification policy was also a revised version of *Hanminjok kongdongch’e t’ongil pangan* (proposal for founding Unitary State Korea), which the Roh Tae-woo regime proposed in 1988. Yet DJ realized the idea with his actual practices through his Sunshine Policy. But his as well as previous South Korean proposals for the unification is slightly different from the North Korean model which claims one nation, two states, and two regional governments. The North has taken this proposal for founding the Democratic Federal Republic of Koryo (DFRK, *Koryŏ yŏnbangje*), as its official policy that has allegedly been submitted and revised by Kim Il-sung since 1980. See more detailed information of the DFRK at the following link:

<http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/newspaper/english/reunification/KoRyo.htm>

the ways in which North Korean migrants become a homogeneous entity of new settlers who are expected to live for “now” and “future”—a government’s figured world which is however less concrete owing to the mixture of the new welfare standard and some remnants of Cold War legacy in the operation procedure.

Recoding the Settlement Process: Filtering, Training, and Negotiating

The state controlled settlement process for the newcomers is comprised of an interrogation system that evolved over decades in the Cold War context, and a neoliberal administrative system that is designed to increase the policy efficiency in practice. As a social field, nonetheless, the process is a series of human interactions that is embodied through narratives, and bodily and facial expressions.

North and South Korean interactions reveal unexpected cultural differences caused by a half-century long national division. Thus the feelings and understandings of one another are accompanied by broader discourses of human dignity, humanitarianism, and pan-Korean nationalism. However, those metaphysical languages are simply translated into the everyday vocabularies that in turn are explicitly “unspoken.” Rather they are circulated as a form of gossip and sensed through gestures, which are often misinterpreted due to the cultural differences.

I will recode the newcomer’s initial period of settlement process from arrival to their duration in the state-run facilities that look somewhat different from the scenario the official government language describes.

Most North Korean migrants are likely to be seized with half-fear and half-anticipation when they arrive at the South Korean international airport.⁵⁶ The feeling of fear is mixed with feelings of guilt about their family members who were left behind in either North Korea or somewhere in a third country, and are faced with the uncertainty of their future in the South (Kim Y-s. 2004). Meanwhile, they expect a new life as legal South Korean citizens and expect that they no longer need to worry about raids and hunger. After passing through the deadly obstacles, some adults may anticipate that the state would literally take care of everything.⁵⁷

With no time to organize their feelings, they are immediately sent to the Taesŏngkongsa in which they are subjects of Joint Examination. This location is a border inspection station where national intelligence agents interrogate each person in order to determine fake or unqualified migrants (e.g., spies, criminals, or Korean-Chinese) from the “real” migrants, and then classify the migrants according to the value of information they can provide about North Korean national secrets. Thus, all the migrants should “tell the truth” and engage in the practice of confessing to the investigator in this center.

In recent years, the investigation course in the Taesŏngkongsa became shorter than before. But even in the early 2000s, a large number of the migrants, no matter what their ages and genders, were likely treated as criminals. By 1999, some migrants were reportedly beaten, humiliated, and tortured during interrogation, and stayed in the center for months.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ At the airport they may see, but it is unlikely that they can read, “Welcome to Korea!” The sign written in English represents part of the changing cultures in South Korea that they have not yet been exposed to. The airport is a space of “betwixt and between” for them to enter into another stage in their life.

⁵⁷ In particular, adult North Korean interviewees told me this point. But young adults who have little and received the benefits of the state in the North did not show this attitude.

⁵⁸ Hankyoreh 21. 1999. April 22.

Those who passed the interrogation are sent to Hanawon in which they experience more freedom than in Taesöngkongsä. When I first visited Hanawon in early 2001, there was no education program for young adults whose numbers were multiplying at the time. All the classes were copied from the ones that had been taught in Taesöngkongsä, which had previously been taught only to adult defectors before Hanawon was built. As the director at the time was looking for civilian support to set up a schooling program for children and young adults, I participated in establishing the Hanadool (one two) School which was the first civilian-run weekday program in such a highly classified government facility.⁵⁹

At the time, Hanawon was, for me, a strange space. The area was fenced with barbed-wire entanglements and guarded by two riot police companies around-the-clock. No civilian was allowed to come inside without an authorized appointment. The uniformed trainees were informed that the heavily armed condition is necessary to protect them from a possible North Korean terrorist attack. The rules and schedules are orderly and divided, and the trainees are managed and disciplined to be docile and obedient.

The Hanawon (House of Unity) is a space where South and North Koreans interact in unequal positions. South Korean officials who once were proud of themselves and excited to work with the “brethrens” found, after a month of working, that they had lost confidence in and were disappointed with the Northerners. To them, the Northerners looked opportunistic, materialistic, selfish, violent, sexually spoiled, hypocritical, and

⁵⁹ Due to my personal situations (married and a full-time staff member of a NGO), I did not stay at Hanawon all the time, but only visited a few times a month. Instead, three young civilians serving as full-time teachers of the Hanadool School stayed on the weekdays.

moreover—not like “us”.⁶⁰

In the same vein, for the Northerners, it was not like what they imagined. When they were taken to tour Seoul, where they all had a luxury suit made and went up to 63 Building to see the prosperity of capitalist South Korea, they felt that they were treated as national heroes and heroines just as the earlier defectors had been. It seemed as if the middle-class life would be guaranteed and realized for them (Chung B-h. 2000).

In reality, however, the majority of them were no longer politically valued defectors, but treated as an uncivilized “Other” in need of being “trained” with little “freedom” to move. But they were supposed to follow the rules because they had yet to receive their own Korean ID. Without holding legal citizenship, their identity, life security, present and future, were all uncertain and fragile.

Nonetheless, at least the newcomers can do many things during breaks between lectures and weekends at Hanawon. Frequent phone calls to reach friends, family members, or relatives in China or even in North Korea are common. Few care that an unauthorized attempt to contact anyone in the North from the South is a serious violation of the National Security Law.

Becoming familiar with the practice of consuming may be the first assimilation exercise into the market economy, though most migrants are not totally unfamiliar with the practice of purchasing. Even before receiving their personal Korean ID, many can hold the most expensive cellular phone in their hands. However, most would not imagine that the first month’s bill may well exceed several hundred dollars for all the international calls they made while at Hanawon.

⁶⁰ From an interview with Mr. Kim in 2002, an official from the Ministry of Unification, who was dispatched to Hanawon for about a year.

In sum, the beginning of their settlement process is accompanied by a complex set of cultural shocks and psychological depressions, as well as first interactions with and mimicry of South Korean people and capitalism. The process is mainly guided by and coupled with South Korean state expectations and diagnoses that are decorated with barbed wire fencing and strict regulations—the state is “omnipresent”. Considering Hanawon as a contact zone in the initial period of the newcomers’ identity configuration, there is much ambiguity and complexity that should be investigated further. The following sections are a discussion about two competing discourses influencing their identity transition in the “liminal” condition.

Regular Citizens: The Neoliberal Modality of Citizenship

Although a new state settlement support system tends to have depoliticized and mobilized the newcomers to assimilate into the South Korean value system, the ways that each government agency treats them are not coherent (Chung B-h. 2009). At Taesŏngkongsa they are interrogated as if spies, welcomed/protected like national assets/trained as new citizens in Hanawon treated as low-income citizens in village offices, regarded as unqualified laborers by the Ministry of Labor, watched out for as potential criminals by local police officers who often excuse minor crimes, and so on.

A main force at the state level may be the principle that they are expected to assimilate as “regular citizens” into the South Korean value system as soon as possible. While there are moral campaigns that appeal to South Koreans to show tolerance and consideration for their “brethrens,” the task of social adjustment is put on the newcomer’s own shoulders. Support programs designed for the migrants’ transition to life in the South,

however, tend to consider less the cross-cultural dimension of the process than underline the importance of “erasing” North Korean ways of thinking and behaving, and refashioning themselves with advanced South Korean norms for faster and successful resettlement.

The construction of biases among South Koreans against the Northerners as lazy, violent, ungrateful toward their Southern helpers, selfish, good at lying, opportunistic, and so on, are often attributed to the embodiments of souls brainwashed by Juche (self-reliance) ideology or *Kimilsungism*; the North Korean official ruling philosophy that accentuates collective national self-independence from foreign influences (see the first section of Chapter 1 for more discussion about Juche).

For example, some researchers have asserted that the main obstacles to the migrants’ initial settlement process are their fixed “North Korean” ideas and ways of interpreting South Korean society (see Kim Y-s. 2004: 123-127). And thus it is premised among South Koreans that their cultural habits should be reformed. Suh highlights that “North Korean defectors are products of their environment, who bring to the South a complex set of North Korean attitudes and values. Since that value system can interfere with their adjustment, it needs to change. For example, their emphasis on saving face stems from having lived in a conformist society. It is not only an obstacle to rational thinking but can even be the cause of failure in South Korea’s market economy” (2002: 75).

These reductionist arguments imply that North Korean cultures and cultural behaviors are useless. Instead, what the newcomers are expected to learn and accept as soon as possible are the norms of good citizenship. Shaped along the line of neoliberal

reforms since the IMF Crisis, the norms of good citizenship stress self-reliance, self-support, creativity, and above all the creation of an “employable” individual as a model citizen (see Song J-s. 2006: 202-203). The concepts of independence and free will are highly valued and thus for the migrants “individual freedom” is perceived as the essence of South Korean capitalist society. Shortly after beginning the “free” life in the South, however, they realize that the “freedom” is different from their previous understandings (Kim Y-s. 2004).⁶¹ They realize that freedom in a capitalist society requires capital. And they encounter that beneath the surface, South Korean society is one where individuals rely on established social networks of family (*hyōryōn*), school (*hakyōn*), and region (*chiyōn*), which they do not have.

In recent years, researchers and Hanawon officers assert the need for diversifying methods to meet individual differences for better training outputs to translate into a higher employment rate. However, it does not mean that the support system would appreciate and allow the individual or collective cultural diversities, but rather those diversities would be suppressed throughout the training courses. With little cultural relativist points of view, but reductionist ones, the state settlement system as a social force tends to keep “Otherizing” the migrants, while depoliticizing them. In other words, the post-division regime that has pursued the normalization of inter-Korean relations based on ethnic nationalism is likely to incur the identity crisis by marginalizing the

⁶¹ The concept of freedom is controversial in liberal and neoliberal capitalist society, as Marx distinguished negative freedom from positive freedom. Basically, freedom is an essence of human beings declared not only in Marxist theory but also in the United States Declaration of Independence. Ideal freedom is neutral and universal. In reality, however, an individual’s freedom is restricted in favor of economic growth in a capitalist society. In the developmental states, for example, laborers’ freedom of forming trade unions has been strictly oppressed by militant regimes for decades in South Korea (see Kwon I-s. 2000, Koo H. 2001, Janelli and Janelli 1993, Moon S-s. 2005). Even in a liberal capitalist state, laborers are only “free to sell labor power”, but not free to live without selling the labor unless they have enough economic capital. Neoliberal norms of good citizenship foreground the productivity in labor power and in the autonomous individual as machinery of governmentality.

migrants, and thus they find themselves as those who are expected to become none other than productive laborers.

The Lingering Cold War Market

Other than the state, Korean conservative media and organizations tend to describe the migrants as both “anticommunist heroes and heroines” and victims of the North Korean regime. The political conceptualization of the migrants was a strategy of the South Korean anticommunist regimes. Descended from legacy and still a powerful hegemonic group, Korean conservatives as well as international conservatives link the issue of North Korean border crossers to human rights issues aimed at encouraging North Korean regime change. Within this anticommunist political scheme, the newcomers are likely to feel a symbolic compensation as a deserving national subject. That is, their political citizenship seems to be constructed in a concrete manner. Accompanied by the conservatives, they also made complaints about the government support system.

However, some also soon realize that the conservatives utilize them as an instrument to achieve and maintain their own hegemony. Conservatives are more interested in defectors who can testify about the brutality of the North Korean regime and who can cooperate with them by criticizing the (at the time) liberal regimes. Just as in the former anticommunist regimes, those who came from elite backgrounds are more valued than the majority underprivileged migrants in the South.

Nonetheless, as far as the conservatives provide events intended to generate a symbolic meaning of life, some continue to rely on and contribute to the conservative anticommunist movements by testifying what they are expected to tell. Given the

“tradition” of the North Korean “story telling market” that has been in place for decades, some migrants become professional anticommunist lecturers as the former “heroes” did.

In a sense, for conservatives, solving North Korean human rights issues is not a goal to achieve but a means to reproduce and enhance their anticommunist identity (Chung B-h. 2004). During the authoritarian regimes they ignored South Korean human rights. Further, the notion of human rights is controversial in South Korean conservative dialogue, because they have hardly meditated on its philosophical and historical backgrounds but appropriated it as a new political apparatus of anticommunism.

By the 1980s, South Korean authoritarian regimes ignored the cultural dimensions that were part of the “heroes” social adjustment processes in the South. The number of defectors by then was so few that the probation system of each defector was relatively well managed by the state. And their daily struggles and negotiations with the cultural differences, in terms of ways of thinking and behaving in the realms of gender, class, and religion, have been hardly examined but long silenced until recently.⁶²

In this regard, my opinion differs from Andrei Lankov’s point in which he stresses that these early migrants had little problem in adjusting to South Korean society because they were from elite social backgrounds (2006). However, I propose that the politicization of the Northerners lacking the cross-cultural perspectives functioned as a discursive condition by which the defectors were presupposed to perform ideologically anticommunist culturally capitalist norms and values with little question.

⁶² On February 4, 2007, Korean newspapers introduced the then living conditions of the Kim Man-chul family who sailed down to the South as a family unit in 1987, when the news media covered their photos and stories, but not this time around. All his children were already grown up and living relatively well. But Kim himself lost all his money by being deceived and was staying at a humble and old house in a rural area (see *Chosun Ilbo*, *Daily Hankyoreh*, *Segye Ilbo*, and *Dong-a Ilbo*, for example, on Feb. 4, 2007).

Centering the political as the migrants' identity has simultaneously ignored seeing cultural diversities and gaps among North Korean migrants. Rather, the view tends to see North Korean society and its people as a homogeneous body seamlessly controlled and molded by Juche ideology. What the migrants testify before South Korean audiences in division language shapes North Korean realities as inhumane, brutal, devastating, and horrible. It looks similar to the format that the former "heroes" delivered in the 1980s. But the contents have changed: while the past anticommunist lectures were more focused on warning about the military threat from the North, recent migrants are supposed to elaborate on the anti-human rights conditions in the North.

When the South Korean state no longer grants migrants a concrete anticommunist identity, some migrants (in particular those who are ex-military officers, ex-agents, ex-party members, et cetera) organize their own groups and actively participate in anti-North Korean movements that are led by South Korean conservative evangelicals.

I have examined in particular the 1997 Act which established the state support programs for the migrants to be part of long-term plans for national unification. By examining recent support programs, especially those run by the government, I have demonstrated that the state training system tends to assimilate the migrants within the norms of neoliberal good citizenship into South Korea. It reflects that the state is unlikely to have a cross-cultural tolerance. Within this frame of acculturation, the migrants encounter identity crisis.

On the other side, despite the state apolitical definition of the migrants, the Cold War legacy has persisted in the issue. While the state has moved away from utilizing the

migrants as an agent of anticommunist propaganda, conservatives continue to identify the migrants in a new language of human rights aimed at North Korea and South Korean “leftists.” As this discourse and practice seem to make them translate their “North Korean identity” as a symbolic capital that can be exchanged as a substantial asset, it becomes an attractive social field in which the migrants participate.

PERFORMING CONVERSION: “CHRISTIAN PASSAGE”

Through an examination of conversion narratives, this section analyzes the processes by which South Korean Protestant language affects the way in which North Korean migrants imagine and organize their sufferings and remake their selves. I consider North Korean migrants’ conversion narratives as a performance hosted largely by conservative churches from which they receive financial and social benefits, and in return provide new spiritual inspiration for South Korean and sometimes foreign believers.

By the notion of performance, I see the conversion narratives not only as a form of ritual, generating “the dual effect of the conversion, the strengthening of their faith and the transformation of their lives” (Stromberg 1993: 3), which also recalls a phase of “Speaking is believing” (Harding 2000: 60). It is also seen as a cultural product, demanding and supplying through the Christian market. It has been common that some South Korean exemplary figures including successful enterprisers, entertainers, sports players, and respectful pastors as well as missionaries deliver their conversion and religious experiences before church members and audiences for converting and enhancing others. It is also not uncommon, but recently increasing, that some North

Korean converts are invited to deliver their *sinang ganchŭng*, witnessing or testimony, to South Koreans, Koreans overseas, and foreign believers.

Public Conversion

One day in late 2007, Mrs. Yang, a North Korean migrant in her late 40s, gave me a call and asked me to translate her testimonial into English. I remembered her saying a week earlier that she was struggling to fit it into two pages because a U.S. church had asked her to send a short version before inviting her. Already a seasoned presenter of her religious testimony before South Korean believers, she was having a hard time finalizing a shorter version. She sounded upset and let me know that she didn't appreciate that the American church was judging her in this way. In the end, though, she did complete her testimony and thus obeyed an institutional global hierarchy in which American churches are usually considered to be higher-up than their South Korean counterparts.

While reading her one-and-a-half-page long narrative, which was indeed her life history written in a Biblical idiom, I was impressed and surprised by two things. First, the piece communicated a clear sense of how God had helped her to overcome a series of sufferings in both North Korea and China since the North Korean Great Famine and how she had in turn carried out God's work. Her testimonial observed the typical storyline that most North Korean converts recount when churches invite them to share their conversion with South Korean believers. But, the second thing that impressed me about her testimony was that the testimonial told of how she came to "Canaan" and depicted South Korea in Biblical terms as the place where there is no suffering, only hope and a new future. This optimism also brought to mind an informal conversation that I had had with

her at our last meeting in 2005. At the time, she expressed her disappointment at crime-ridden South Korean society,⁶³ where she experienced social discrimination, where politicians were corrupt, where North Korean children lagged hopelessly behind in public schools, where her friends had lost all their money through fraud, where families were broken, and where Christianity was materialistic and hypocritical. In this part, I am interested in the disjuncture and contradictions between this sort of accounting and her Christian testimonial—a mode of narration that I argue she acquired in concert with formal religious institutions in the South.

In this institutional context, the migrants are directed to imagine suffering as spatially and temporally Other—in the past and in North Korea. I argue that these “formulaic” testimonials preclude description of the sufferings that they as migrants come to encounter in South Korea. Indeed, the evangelical language that they learn and speak in church setting tends to translate their current South Korean life into the “blessed life.” Additionally, Biblical language promotes them to erase the hand of institutional or human mediation, instead allowing only for supernatural power as the mediator that leads their religious conversion and passage to South Korea. In this way, their conversion to Protestantism entails both their physical relocation from North Korea/China to South Korea and internal transformation from *Juche*, North Korean national ideology, to Christianity.

⁶³ North Korean migrants tend to accept South Korean TV news contents as a representation of the whole society. That is, they are unlikely to think that some news contents are selected to attract audiences. For them, South Korean society is scary place to live given TV news broadcasts of murders, anti-government street protests, or this and that crimes that are frequent in a capitalist society. On the other hand, because of the diversity, they also rely on TV programs for obtaining most of their information about South Korean society. It reflects the different functions of mass media in North and South Korea. In the North, the mass media is a national means of broadcasting political propaganda, and only what the people should know. In this light, some propose the importance of educating them with guidelines in receiving the contents of mass media (e.g. Lee C-h et al. 2007)

Following Diane Austin-Broos, I consider conversion as “a cultural passage,” which “involves interrelated modes of transformation that generally continue over time and define a consistent course ... [and] an encultured being arriving at a particular place” (Austin-Broos 2003: 1-2). For North Korean converts, the passage and the “particular place” are not merely imaginary but are actually rather real. Their passages in their accounts consist of the actual crossing of national borderlines, numerous physical obstacles, and cultural encounters (such as language), and internal rationalization of conversion, in Weberian terms. This suggests that North Korean conversion cases seem to obscure a disjunction Simon Coleman finds between “the frequent charismatic depiction of instant, radical, and total conversion and an ethnographic perspective that indicates a much more gradual and ambiguous socialization into shared linguistic and ritual practices” (Coleman 2003: 16). The conversion narratives North Korean converts deliver to the listeners in the frame of before-and-after entail a considerable rupture between their past and present lives, and thus sound like the “charismatic depiction” on the one hand. On the other, their narratives are also comprised of how they struggled to “rationalize” the Word (e.g. creationism vs. evolutionism) while confronting seemingly endless and extreme tragedies, misfortunes, and agonies that are in the end translated as being God’s preparations and serving as the ultimate evidence of miracles strengthening their faith and justifying their “sincerity.” That is, they take into account the series of experiences, the gradual process of awakening to the knowledge that God is alive in the Biblical language in which their physical sufferings and interior transformations are properly recorded.

In the previous chapter regarding North Korean migrants' passage, I maintained that Church serves as an alternative shelter for the border crossers who are doubly criminalized in both China and North Korea. Among the refugees, the number of those who came to hold the so-called "South Korean Dream" and fled from China to South Korea by either penetrating foreign embassies in Beijing or crossing other countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Taipei, and Mongolia where there are South Korean or UN facilities, multiplied since the mid-1990s. Until recently, a startling 90 percent of North Koreans identified themselves as Christian when they arrived in South Korea.

The ethnographic research data I collected in both 2000 and 2007 in Northeast China reveals that North Korean migrants make the decision to go to South Korea at tremendous cost, both literally and metaphorically. Except for those who were selected by a Christian organization (such as Durihana), few North Koreans end up in the South without paying a broker fee. The amount of the broker fee per person is typically almost half of the cash grant that the South Korean government gives migrants at settlement. For example, it was about 10,000 USD in the early 2000s when the migrants received around 30,000 USD in a cash grant from the South Korean government at the beginning of their settlement. The amount decreased 2,500 to 4,000 USD in recent years,⁶⁴ as the South Korean government converted the cash grant to a system of long-term settlement support (see chapter 3). The broker line once established by South Korean missionaries now

⁶⁴ As for the broker line, it is difficult to give readers a clear picture because it varies according to local informants. It is true that the number of defector-brokers increases, but I was told that even such brokers have connections with Christian safe houses as a temporal harbor to transfer the migrants to another smuggler. And still the majority of migrants tend to rely on Christian networks and shelters in search of sponsors or safer underground railroads. As for the broker fee, it is a controversial matter for the new arrivals. Many new arrivals are bothered by paying off the fee to the brokers in the early period of their settlement. It has been a chronic problem in the population. See "A Missionary's perspective" video clip in PBS Wide Angle, *Crossing Heaven's Border* (2009), for a brief comment on the matter.

consists of Korean-Chinese and North Korean migrants who have a South Korean ID. Also, churches and missionaries run secret shelters for the refugees where they intensively encounter Protestantism through performing its rituals and reading/writing the Bible over and over again.

In addition to the physical relocation, conversion is for the migrants “a matter of the individual conscience” that intersects with political conditions (van der Veer 1996: 10-14). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Juche (*Kimilsungism*)-Protestant dichotomy is central to the shift of North Korean converts’ loyalty from Kim Il-sung to God, and from “cursed” communist North Korea to “God blessed” “free” and “prosperous” South Korea. It is key to demonstrate such a changed conscience. In order to show their “sincerity” as Kato Hiroshi (2008) punctuates (cited in the conclusion of chapter 3), it is common for those in shelters to memorize thousands of Bible verses in China. And later in the South, their conversion narratives contain a political resistance against the North Korean regime.

Church and First Generation Unification

When the migrants arrive in the South, Protestant churches play an important role in their settlement. After the government, churches provide the second-largest set of resources, including financial aid, household goods, and Sunday lunch and prayer/bible study gatherings. Some of the churches run special training programs for improving the migrants’ spirituality and job opportunities.

The church imagines itself to be fostering a social laboratory that simulates the conditions of a reunified nation (e.g. Freedom School brochure 2007; NS Church Task

Force proposal 2006). Depicted as returned “prodigal sons and daughters,” the Korean church gives a symbolic meaning to their identity, the “first generation unifiers” who would contribute heavily to the evangelization of a unified nation.⁶⁵ As predestined evangelical subjects, called “reserved missionaries” (Yoon I-j. 2005:8), following the logic and nature of the repentance story of “the prodigal son,” they are expected to deconstruct and deny their past as one outdated and evil, and to integrate into the modern and good South Korean Christian “family.”

Further, North Korean converts are urged to acknowledge that their disconnection from God was a “sin” due to the North Korean communist regime, and Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il who they once worshiped. In North Korean national law and sense, the migrants are national traitors, but in Protestant language it is North Korea that deceives its people with “*Kimilsung* cultism.” In this way, most North Korean converts’ religious confessions demonize North Korea and celebrate a “God-blessed” South Korean society. Thus evangelical language directs the migrants to discount present encounters as suffering and to instead see experiences in South Korea as part of God’s plan to strengthen their belief.

On the diagram of North Korean mission, they are weighed with holy God’s callings so that they shall “return” to their homeland as God’s warriors to enlighten their families and neighbors with Christianity and free market economy. Although they are apparently located at the bottom of the church hierarchy as well as South Korea’s class pyramid, they are served by established South Korean deacons/deaconesses and pastors

⁶⁵ Kim Byung-ro, a Christian scholar in unification and theology, manifests, “In the unification processes, South and North Koreans shall experience conflicts due to a gap between rich and poor or different value systems. If the Korean church would work hard in serving North Korean migrants, it could contribute to not only the gradual peaceful unification but also ultimately the revival of Korean church” (2008.4.28. *Koomin ilbo*, my translation).

who in turn try to let them feel God's "love" and believe in that Jesus came for us, died for our sin, and will come again. The South Korean church believes that there is none other better than the North Korean migrants in realizing God's great plan for a Korean nation and the Kingdom of God.

Nonetheless, evangelical scholars and staff working with the migrants continue to wonder why the migrants undergo such difficulties in adjusting to South Korea. Referring to Yoon In-jin's analysis, it is because South Korean society has not yet had sympathy and mutual agreement on what the migrants mean to 'us'. In the same vein, Park Heung-soon, a theologian in post-colonial studies in Korea, points out the problem of evangelical projecting of North Korean identity into a rather fixed category. Instead, he suggests acknowledging their hybrid and heterogeneous identity, as Bible says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, KJV). He argues that the migrants are neither South Koreans nor North Koreans, but seen as both and an even greater other, which is "Christian." His theological standpoint is ecumenical, as progressive/liberal Protestants call themselves as opposed to the evangelical.

Supported by previous sociological studies showing that North Korean migrants have dual and contradictory perspectives on South Korean society (Yoon I-j. 2005; see also my discussion below), his suggestion to the Korean church is quite compelling. However, I doubt that Korean evangelicals would accept his post-colonial approach to the migrants. Rather, evangelicals would deny seeing the relationship between South and North Koreans as being equivalent to that of Jews and Greeks. It is simply because the two Koreans are not different ethnic groups in an evangelical sense. Note that however

the “Reds” or leftists in both Koreas are not yet included. As I shall show, also the migrants themselves, once their conversion narratives are demanded in the evangelical market, may not demonstrate the universal Christian membership allowing for the “coexistence” of ethnic, ideological, and cultural differences.

A Reformatting Life

I will review the main storyline of the testimonials of Mrs. Yang and some other famous converts, then I will analyze the testimonies in comparison to their “behind” narratives that I was told. Note that for them, their witnessing is seen as a public activity. Church for them is not merely a “private” and spiritual space separate from a public and material world. Rather, it serves as a “stage,” as both a sacred and secular altar where theoretically their identity and faith are reborn, reformed, and revitalized as they “speak” more and more, though this is sometimes ambiguous and contradictory in practice.

Their testimonies begin with a phrase to worship God, speaking their submission to God. From the beginning, they clarify their changing identity—they are Protestant. In her short letter, Mrs. Yang states:

Now I will live only for Jesus. Because I know now that He has listened to my prayers and that He is the way and the life for me.

Referring to John 14:6 (NKJV), “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,” she declares Jesus as her savior and Lord. It is noteworthy that her second line “Because ... He has listened to my prayers” implies her theological inclination, which is in fact a dominant characteristic of Korean evangelical Protestantism. That is, “answer-theology” focusing on “religious experience” rather than

“doctrine.” As I mentioned in chapter 2, this-worldly oriented theology of prosperity emphasizing health, wealth, along with spirituality as God’s blessing is equivalent to the answer-theology. This seeing/experiencing-is-believing sort has been more prevalent in Korean mainline churches than in relationship-theology, which emphasizes doctrine itself over believing without seeing/experiencing (see Kim S-g. 2007). The phrase inspires audiences to be ready to experience another “conversion” by listening to what God has done for her (Harding 2000). Then, what evidences does she show us to prove that “He has listened to my prayers?”

I had to leave North Korea because of my family’s extreme poverty, which began with the waning economy in North Korea ever since Kim Il Sung died in 1994. So in September 1998, I told my family I would go to China to make money and left. But it wasn’t easy to make money.

In four months, I was homesick for my children, so I was crossing the Tumen River, but I was arrested and sent to a labor camp or RodongDanRyunDae where people who committed minor offenses and repatriated defectors are imprisoned. There, I was diagnosed with typhoid fever. In a month a half time, two were diagnosed with it including me. The other patient died on the day of release, and I was sent home to treat the disease. But my husband caught it and died, and I recovered in 40 days. Only those who lived in North Korean can truly understand the situations we were in then.

Dead bodies were scattered about on the streets. If an animal died, it was taken to be eaten, but when a man died, no one bothered with it. So I tried China once again. In October 1998, ten days before the election for Kim Jung Il, I escaped North Korea

(leaving my three children behind), and this became the reason I would not be able to return to North Korea.

Her accounts of the labor camp and the dead bodies are key elements in describing both individual and collective experiences of the famine for non-North Korean audiences. And the moment when she was about to die of typhoid fever intensifies both an extremely poor condition of the labor camp, and the possibility of God's hands saving her, unlike the cases of the two deaths of another patient and her husband. For Western audiences the scenes she describes may recall Auschwitz (Jeff Jacoby in the Boston Globe, 2004. 2. 8) during World War II. More painful moments are often emotionally described with tears and gesturing in actual testimonials.

One day Mrs. Yang heard that her children she left behind in North Korea came to China too. She began to search for them and looked everywhere. It was at this time she first heard about God from a friend who told her that if she prayed hard, she would find her children.

I even consulted Shamans, but they only talked nonsense. I first got to hear about God through a friend, and when I heard that if I prayed hard, I would find my children, so began to pray in words that I didn't even understand at the time. I said in my prayers that God is the one who really created the world, and since God made people and the Korean Unification is also in His hands, so if He were really that God who is almighty, then since it had been less than two years since I saw my kids, if He can make me find my kids again, I would do anything for Him. Within two months of prayer I was reunited with all of my three children, and I began to work in a restaurant at a retreat facility that belonged to a church.

Prayer is a key component in Korean evangelicalism. It channels between Christians and God in the name of Jesus Christ. And it is not uncommon that people suddenly begin praying to the Lord when facing a dire emergency. Although they do not know how to do it, they beg Him for pardon by saying “Please grant my wish, and then I would do anything for you.” Coincidentally, when I went to China in 2000, I made several visits to the church where she had once worked. The church was well-known because many North Korean refugees came there for aid. When I went there, I was told that the retreat center in which she had worked was under construction with financial sponsorship from a South Korean church. The construction was an alternative way to employ and help refugees. However, I witnessed struggles and conflicts among South Korean missionaries, Korean-Chinese Christians, and the migrants. Moreover, the church minister, a South Korean, had been frequently imprisoned for caring for refugees. Considering the local geopolitical situation, the fact that she worked there could be seen as really good luck. But she was not able to stay any longer.

One day the church told me they couldn't pay me anymore and I must find a way to support my family. Then I began to pray again and received His answer. His answer was for me to go to South Korea—the Canaan—after traveling through China, Vietnam, and Cambodia. God helped me reflect on non-believing, poor nations and God-loving South Korea, and He let me realize why North Korea is in such poor state and also what I must do.

This strong Weberian sense of Protestantism accentuating the economic prosperity as a sign of blessing is not unique to South Korea, but exists widely in the Third World countries influenced by Pentecostal churches. Even Catholic churches, for

instance El Shaddai in the Philippines, gain popularity by stressing this-worldly successfulness (Wiegele 2005). Similarly the cases of natural disasters, wars, and widespread death from starvation that have taken place over the world in recent years are also interpreted as a consequence of not accepting Jesus Christ as savior. For instance, Rev. Kim H. of K mega-church gave a sermon on the colossal tsunami that killed tens of thousands of people in Indonesian coastal communities in December 2004. He attributed the cause of the disaster to the fact that the majority of Indonesians were Muslim (Chosun 2005. 1.12). Similarly, Rev. Cho delivered a sermon during a Sunday service in his Yoido Full Gospel Church about his visit to Pakistan: “One day, I went to Pakistan to lead a revival service. It is normal that there are about 10 to 12 children in one household. It is because the country is so poor that children frequently starve to death. So it is said that only half of children survive. They go through the devastating poverty. Is that poverty a God’s blessing? No one consider that poorness as a joy or blessing. It is a curse (*kŭkŏtŭn chŏju ipnida*)” (Cho 2005: 56, cited in Chung Y-s. 2006: 296-297, my translation). According to such evangelical views on the relationship between economy and religion, Mrs. Yang attributes the main cause of the country's poorness to their religion. And she also interprets the reason why God led her to South Korea is to show the reality and let her acknowledge what she is destined to do.

Her escape journey mimicked a pilgrimage. She continues:

Accepting God as my savior and meeting my children did not end my suffering. Farewell after reunion with my child came to us. My daughter was sent back to North Korea, but God stayed with me all the way to South Korea. Even now I think it was such a treasure memory for me. My daughter came to South Korea two months after I came to

South Korea. As God said in Psalm 34:18 “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” and John 15: 7 “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” I indeed experienced that when I asked him on my knees, He gave my wishes; even when I was a dead person, there is nothing God, the creator of life, cannot do; and lived the fact that I can love and help not only the souls of North Koreans but also those who are suffering just like me here in South Korea.

My vision for now on is to build a church to serve as a mediator not only for those who are going through family problems but also to help the ten thousand North Korean defectors in South Korea to accept God as his savior so they can send Gospel to their families who are left behind in North Korea rather than just crying for them.

In her testimony, some of her sufferings are ended by God who eventually brought her and her daughters to South Korea. Her before-and-after transformation is not only spiritual but also territorial. Even though she first came to pray for God and rely on the church in China, her religiosity remained incomplete until she and her family arrived in South Korea.

In sum, Mrs. Yang’s testimonial gives me a chance to reflect on North Korean migrants’ conversion to Christianity. It is a physical and spiritual transition, which requires submission to South Korean evangelicalism. It also determines what their Christian subjectivity should look like. Yet in another sense, their religious narratives may aim to challenge their southern counterparts who have been seeking individual salvation both in this-worldly and eternal life. Behind the grammar of the evangelical

language, what they want to do with the audiences is raise awareness about a human tragedy taking place “right over there” instead of celebrating a God-blessed South Korea. However, their voices are filtered by a particular demand of church hierarchy and translated into a South Korean evangelical ritual that is by and large infused with the Cold War legacy. The mission is thus ambivalent and controversial.

CONCLUSION

I have examined the ways in which North Korean migrants have struggled to reconfigure their new identities in the two competing social spaces. Methodologically, while I have described the South Korean government settlement program that does not include the migrants’ voices, I have chosen North Korean converts’ conversion narratives such as Mrs. Yang’s in order to articulate that the church emerges as a public space for the migrants. What I have tried to highlight is that they, as either a collective group or individuals, are subjectified as “imaginary citizens” projecting in an imagined world—a reunified nation or Kingdom of God. This point leads us to reconsider discourses about South Korean ethnic nationalism.

In his recent volume *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, Gi-Wook Shin calls the South Korean unification proposal an “‘ethnic homogeneity-national unification thesis,’ a position that declares that a divided Korea must and will be reunified because Koreans are ethnically homogeneous and have been so for thousands of years” (2006: 186). He also points out that the North also stresses “the value of ethnic/racial nationalism in the ‘theory of the Korean nation as number one’” (2006: 187).

My analyses of both the state apolitical approach to and evangelical conceptualization of the migrants suggest that both share this ethnic homogeneity-national unification thesis; that is, the state's diagnostic training process attempts to erase North Korean ways of thinking and behaving, while the conservatives' language disallows Juche ideology whether in its cultural form or temporarily brainwashed mindset.

In this light, the South Korean version of reunified nation building would also become what Pierre van den Berghe (2006) stresses, "nation killing," because the newcomers' settlement process reflects that all cultural diversities should be suppressed. On the one hand, I thus partly agree with Roy Richard Grinker who argues that unification "can be a euphemism for conquest, a gloss for winning the war ... and [a belief] that North Korea must be totally absorbed into the South, its state destroyed, and its people assimilated" (1998: 23, 49, recited from Shin G-w. 2006: 187).

On the other hand, I am hesitant to confirm that this South Korean ethnic homogeneity-national unification thesis works without conflicts on the ground. More significant problems seem not to lie in the thesis itself. Rather, as a figured world, it is formed and forming "as social process and in historical time" (Holland et al. 1998:55), in which North Korean migrants are situated. Indeed, their settlement processes show that the myth of ethnic homogeneity that has been the hegemonic discourse in both North and South Korea is problematized. Thus an alternative sense of belonging is negotiated in the interaction between the migrants and their Southern counterparts. My story moves on to the sites where my various discussions will culminate.

CHAPTER 5

IDEAL BODY, TRUE CHRISTIANS: THE FREEDOM SCHOOL

“I am the future of the nation!”

This is the motto of the Freedom School (FS), which sounds decisive, heroic, and definitely nationalistic. The school’s name suggests that “freedom” is what the refugees didn’t have in North Korea. The dean of the school, Mr. Song, a forty-six year old gentle Christian and former college instructor of North Korean politics, stresses with great conviction that the motto is given by God to empower these “brethren” to be born-again national leaders. The motto is a sacred message hung on the wall, interestingly printed in a “cute” font on a square cloth on which there is also a map of the Korean peninsula. The motto is attached to a pink heart with wings, and smaller pink hearts are embroidered here and there (see figure 5.1). It was made several years earlier, representing that the future of a unified Korea must be carried out not by masculine warriors of God, but by love, big and small. On the other side, “Love and bless you (*Sarang-hago ch’ukbok-hapnida*)!” is written in various colors, and is attached to the wall right above a school board panel. If one sees the wall and ceiling decorations, FS does look like a Sunday school classroom for children in church. In a sense, it is: “What we are doing for them is simple. That is, just like *fixing a necktie* if it is not put on in a right way, we assist them to make up for some minor shortcomings,” stated a deacon of the FS advisory board.

Fixing a necktie sounds much more pragmatic and softer than imagining a national future. The FS is actually carrying out both tasks at the same time. “We” and “they” are all Koreans, sons and daughters of the Father. But “they” have been living far away for a while, and have recently “returned” to the bosom of Our Father. They need to

be refashioned to become “normal” in the South. Unlike the cases of foreign missionaries who often immediately find major apparent cultural differences in their mission subjects, South Koreans at FS assume that they need to fix only the very “minor errors” of their northern counterparts. “We” and “they” are ethnically homogeneous, and the presumption is that Korean culture is inherently embodied in all Koreans. Such ethnic nationalism in which race, ethnicity, and nation are conflated throughout Korean modern history (Shin 2006; Palais 1998) is at the heart of the Christian mission for North Korean migrants and North Korea.



Figure 5.1. (Left) “I am the future of the nation” motto on the wall. (Right) “Love and Bless you” on the other side. (photographed by Jin-Heon Jung)

In examining the Freedom School as a contact zone between South Korean Christians and their northern counterparts, I highlight the ways in which North Korean migrants are trained to refashion their “outdated” ways of thinking and to conform to those of South Korean Protestant capitalist norms. At the same time, I want to stress that the process of “fixing” also touches on complicated and dynamic reactions and negotiations with each other: the co-ethnic relations are mediated by Christianity/God; emotional struggles are often silenced in the name of Jesus Christ and through the metaphor of family; the apparent divide in socio-economic inequality and class status between South Korean hosts and the migrants is likely to be obscured by the principle of

ethnic homogeneity; rational misunderstandings are skipped over or simply negated by the belief that God will speak to “your hearts” (Harding 2000); and present individual sufferings are shared or ignored for “the future of the nation” that God has already prepared for “us.” As such, the tensions and tacit harmonies coexist and are mediated by biblical idioms (love, mercy, blessing, chosen, provision, and so forth) and by the shared sense of ethnic homogeneity. That is, the Bible and Korean ethnic consciousness manage co-ethnic relations in the Freedom School (FS), an emblem of the Korean Church.

I consider FS to be a heterogeneous space, or “heterotopia” to borrow from Foucault (1967), implying the dual (real and imagined) meanings of post-division Korea. Like the metaphor of a garden, as Foucault addresses, FS programs contain almost all core subjects needed to teach about Protestant ethics, capitalist etiquette, and key information for employment and small entrepreneurship in South Korea. This “modern” microcosm is “a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault 1967, in the sixth principle). I do not, however, want to give the impression that FS is a fixed site, one in which all social reality is tightly scripted or controlled. In concert with the concept of a figured world from previous chapters, FS as a culturally constructed space is constituted “as if” it transcends “Cold War identity” (Kim S. 2007) and their experiences with cultural differences in the school allow South Korean Christians to imagine their interactions as a simulation of a unified condition.

In light of FS as a social space of asymmetrical yet dynamic co-ethnic relationships following the discussion in chapter 3, it is useful to rest on previous anthropological works on Christian missionization in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Attending to the relationship between foreign missionaries and local indigenous people, anthropologists have in part underscored the role missionaries played as a crucial imperial force in the local transformations from the “primitive” to the “civilized” (for example, see Hefner 1993; van der Veer 1996; Burdick 1993). Equally, the studies have not overlooked the “dialectical relations” between the missionaries and local people. Missionary work thus inherently contains a tension between two different subjects, and even tensions between the missionaries themselves and the Lord as well as the Christianity they practice. Andrew Orta (2004: ix) stresses, “As an effort to convert diverse peoples of the world to what is taken to be a universal truth, and as an effort that at the same time inevitably gives rise to a range of regionally ‘flavored’ religious identities, global Catholicism well reflects a tension often attributed to globalization.” Elisa Sampson Vera Tudela (2000), in analyzing a new form of hagiographic writing in the 16–18 century, illuminates that the authors created that kind of religious writing in the process of “cultural interchange” and “negotiation” in the colonial New World environment.

While keeping in mind this point of undetermined inter-group relations with respect to the Korean church’s global project of North Korean mission, I maintain that the way the church provides services for the migrants makes them a distinctive social institution that “seek[s] to produce a new man through a process of ‘deculturation’ and ‘reculturation’” (Bourdieu 1977:94, cited in Comaroff 1992:70) in the post-division Northeast Asia context. Increasing flows of people and cultural products under the shadow of significant remaining Cold War tensions in the region bring our attention to the matter of “dismembering and re-membering” (Comaroff 1992:70) of people on the

move physically and metaphorically that constitutes such global flows. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus—though they do not explicitly use this word but refer to bodily habit—John and Jean Comaroff instead draw our attention to the individual human body that “mediates between self and society” (1992:70).

It inspires me to see the ways in which the ultimate goal of the Korean church's provision of service for the new arrivals from the North is to convert them into the bearers of a modern and new South Korean value system through envisioning Christianized unification. As the deacon's metaphorical phrase “fixing a necktie” crystallizes, Korean Christians who work for the migrants tend to measure their degree of social adjustment, personality, and more importantly their religiosity, by their bodily appearance and behaviors. Speaking Seoulite language, whitening skin, and obedient bodily manners are a few among many examples that are taught for the sake of making “successful” North Korean subjects in the job/religious “market.” It is ironic, however, that the FS staff always stresses the “interior” mind over the “exterior” body.⁶⁶ This does not mean to say that it is a conventional Cartesian body-mind binary opposition. Instead, it implies dualistic, incoherent, often contradictory, and more importantly somewhat hypocritical (as some migrants told me in secret) characteristics of Korean Christians' language and practice.

How then do the migrants willingly or unwillingly submit themselves to the church system? By providing ethnographic vignettes of the Freedom School, rather than answer this query, this chapter seeks to capture the cultural processes of “transcending”

⁶⁶ This tendency seems to have multiple roots: a militant method in education that exceptionally stresses the mental/spiritual armament along with physical punishments; a forced ethnic consciousness that intends to homogenize Korean bodies; and obviously the nature of evangelical Christianity attaching great importance to the faith.

and “enduring” the socio-ideological chasm between North Korean migrants and South Korean Christians—seemingly similar but historically different—through a medium and in the name of Jesus Christ. With the notion of “transcendence,” I intend to avoid Christianity as “a kind of secondary phenomenon or top coat that has been applied by external forces [the state or colonial missionaries]” (Cannell 2006:12, see also 39-45 for the term of “transcendence”). Rather, I consider Korean Christianity as a primary force and vehicle for the North and South Korean participants in a heterogeneous figured world—an imaginary condition that simulates the future of a unified Korea. The rest of this chapter will crystallize classroom metaphors and the healing camp ritual during which two different national subjects encounter cultural differences, interpret and misunderstand them in their own terms, and yet simultaneously express love and affection in both a sacred and secular sense. With this ethnography I end my dissertation but do not intend to finalize North Korean migrants’ Christian passage. Rather, I wish to open up further discussions and questions, hoping to contribute to both practical and academic activities on this issue.

THE HETEROGENEOUS CLASSROOM AND IDEAL CITIZENS

In this section, I examine the Freedom School that aspires to be an imaginary national ethnic enclave where South Korean Christians and North Korean migrants cluster and struggle to seek co-ethnic assimilation and “true” Christianity. These are not equal, but are asymmetrical co-ethnic relations premised on and continued from the Chinese context in chapter 3. Thus, it is the migrants who are expected to “listen” to and “follow” what South Korean Christians teach and guide. Indeed, I maintain that within

the basic logic of their conversion to Christianity, which is the ultimate goal of the mission—yet can be “chosen” by an individual’s “free will” in theory—the migrants are mobilized for salvation to take decisive action, “an absolute break between a pre-Christian past and the present,” just as Olivia Harris observed of the sixteenth-century missionaries in the Andes (2006:53). In order to stand and “perform” conversion narratives before South Korean believers, that is, to speak in Korean evangelical language as Mrs. Yang does in chapter 4, it takes time. And it is not merely language per se. Rather it is the “discipline of body” (Cannell 2006:29)—or reforming bodily habits, as the necktie metaphor implies.

From the standpoint of Korean evangelicalism, as I have mentioned throughout this thesis, *Juche* is considered to be an evil spirit which not only brainwashes “innocent” people, but also lives in their bodily habits. In order to reset their mind and body, the South Korean Church, which is by no means singular, tends to consider that the Bible alone may not work the transformation, but may do so in combination with proper “education.” Korean Christian history has its roots in controlling personal behaviors from the beginning. The first generation of foreign missionaries not only led campaigns but also institutionalized regulations against habitual drinking, smoking, and gambling, as they viewed these as the main causes of the poverty and poor health conditions in nineteenth-century Korea.

The FS program was, however, run in an evolved and tolerant manner. Most FS class hours are occupied by lectures as part of the whole-person education (*chōnin kyōkyuk*) on the basis of Christian spirit in order for the migrants (*kyoyuksaeng*) to successfully settle down in South Korea (taken from an FS pamphlet). At the beginning

of my fieldwork in FS, I sat on a chair in the middle or relatively rear rows with the migrants, “as if” I was one of them, paying full attention to the lectures hoping to catch what FS was teaching. The contents of the lectures were “fascinating” for me, and I tried to memorize or write down almost everything about the economics of daily life. For example, not only how to succeed in running an online shopping mall and how to prepare for a job interview, but also about manners and etiquette, including how to bow, talk, dress, and so forth, for building new human relationships necessary to be “[t]he liberal, free-market subject as the model of citizenship” (Ong 2003:8). I even found myself moved by the lectures about the importance of positive thinking and a purposeful life, and realization of the true love of Jesus.

It did not take too long to realize that most trainees were not interested as much as I was in the “contents” of the lectures and the meanings delivered through language. It was not only because of a language gap, namely the South Korean language that had become “much too westernized” in contrast with the nationalized North Korean tongue, but because the training process as a ritual—a rite of passage—seemed more important. Indeed, FS itself serves as a lived ritual space, transforming secular meanings, and sacred moments. In other words, it is neither the Bible, nor the core knowledge, but the integration of the two into one in their hearts and body that is mediated by FS. Although some migrants memorized thousands of verses of the Bible in China, they are aware that they cannot fully know the “truth.” Instead, they come to agree that at stake is a holistic corporeal feeling, one that can best be sensed in the sort of mood that is created in FS itself.

Ritual of Love and Ideal Citizens

Noting that Susan Harding (1987) takes the significance of the “rhetoric” and “nonsensuous, linguistic means” over the ritual, Simon Coleman (2006:167-169) argues that “language cannot simply be divorced from sensual forms,” and that for Word of Life adherents the orality (uttering) of words is equally or more significant for the speakers than the “fixity of the written word” (reading). I support Coleman’s view and at the same time want to add that equally important are the various forms in which words are performed: singing gospel songs, decorating a space where a group of people gather, and even participating in a ritual process are not secondary, but equally serve to “witness” and “catechize” the words. From this standpoint, I intend to juxtapose two different depictions of FS. The first is an outsider’s point of view—fact-centered, objective, and informative. The second may sound nostalgic and metaphorical. The purpose of this comparison is to illuminate FS as both a real and imagined space in which the migrants and their southern counterparts are situated and refashioned to become other selves—ideal citizens. More significantly, as FS space serves as a ritual stage, norms such as sincerity (*seongsil*), self-reliance, and independent subject-making with which the migrants are to be “re-membered” in the South are also empowered in a sacred frame.

The first is as follows: FS operates every Saturday and Sunday for male and female North Korean adults from their 20s to 50s. The number of trainees selected each semester (eight months long) is around fifty, 80 percent female and 20 percent male, which reflects the current trend of the North Korean migrant population in South Korea and abroad. In order to enter this program, the candidates submit a personal career paper with a recommendation letter. They then take written exams, and finally, undergo oral

interviews one by one. Once admitted, they are required to attend class from 9:00 am to 4:00 p.m. every Saturday and Sunday, and not to miss more than two days in order to receive the so-called monthly scholarship, which is about 230 USD. Although the scholarship has been criticized by both outside and inside observers who point out that the money can be seen as “bait” to attract North Korean migrants, staff members consider it to be an unavoidable issue. As for program content, classes are largely divided into two broad categories. For the sake of simplicity, the first category concerns how North Koreans as individuals achieve economic and social success in life either by opening a business or gaining employment at a workplace; and the second category concerns raising North Koreans’ level of religiosity. The former classes are mainly taught by Christian CEOs or professors from a particular field and the latter by FS staff members, as they are all well-trained Christians. Overall, the program aims to give its North Korean trainees a lesson for successful living in a South Korean capitalist system that depends on individual efforts.

FS is not merely a black box in which migrants are “disciplined.” It is rather vitalized and becomes a metaphysical space where the people are beloved and blessed with each other. This is the other meaning of FS which is transformed by people who like to sing the song “You are born to be loved”:

Do you know, you are born to be loved by our God
Within your life, you've been receiving His love
The love of God has began since creation,
Which through our fellowship ripens.
Because of your existence on the earth
We have a great joy among us.
You are born to be loved by our God
Even now you receive His great love.

With outspread arms, “we” look each other in the eye and exchange smiles on “you” and “love.” The FS classroom turns into a “figured kingdom” in which South Korean evangelical ideas and finances are invested and to which some fifty “chosen” North Korean migrants are believed to be “led” or “invited” by God’s hands every year. It is a space of love and blessing that should be key values for both the present and future lives of the migrants who in turn will become leaders of a future Korea, a unified and Christianized nation. Referring to the words beautified on the walls, it seems as if there is no Weber’s “iron cage,” Marx’s “alienation,” Nietzsche’s “nihilism”—and more importantly—no “South and North” allowed in both imagination and practice, but only “pink”-colored optimism based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Every Saturday and Sunday from nine in the morning, the FS space is filled by the fifty or so North Korean newcomers “listening to” the words, the lectures and messages, and also “practicing” what they have learned and are supposed to do in the near future. They are FS trainees, potential “disciples” prepared to serve themselves as individuals and the nation, entities which are theoretically seamlessly integrated.

Outside of FS, South Korean reality is harsh. Popular perceptions about North Korean migrants have shifted to a new minority group, that of the Other within. Although it is believed that South and North Koreans are ethnically the same and that they share language and basic customs, this myth of ethnic homogeneity often turns out to be a burden, and is easily realized as being a falsehood. In the meantime, statistics continue to show that about 70 percent of the migrants continue to “regularly” participate in religious activities and that more than 85 percent of them appreciate the various help that they receive from their religious affiliations while settling down in South Korea (Jeon W-t.

2003, 2005; Choi S-j. et al. 2005). In this light, South Korean authorities and Christian leaders as well as the migrants themselves agree that the role of the church is crucial for the migrants' effective settlement in the South (Kim Y-s. 2004; Suh J-j. 2003; Jeon W-t. 2007). Here the term "effective settlement" refers not only to the church's substantial role as a welfare agency for the migrants, but also to awaken the church's apostolic role in guiding/converting the migrants to capitalist Protestantism in evangelical terms. That is, the church's mission for the migrants takes on two tasks at the same time—the secular and the sacred, as has been shown elsewhere in missionary history.

FS is an emblem of Korean church activities that emphasize recovering the human dignity of North Korean migrants by establishing a "personal relationship with God." FS is a ritual stage mediating and mobilizing this relationship. However the relationship turns into a tri-cornered one: the migrants—South Koreans—God. These tri-cornered relations mediate with one another: God led the migrants to the South, South Korean Christians lead the migrants to God, and the migrants serve to strengthen their southern counterparts, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. It is as if South Koreans play the role of the preacher, who, Susan Harding says, "'stand in the gap' between the language of the Christian Bible and the language of everyday life" (2000: 12).

"Mediated" by South Korean Christians in the aura of Jesus' love, the migrant adults are expected to be born again as "ideal citizens." Norms like sincerity, hard work, self-reliance, and independence, also emphasized by the government, are likely to be the "truth" in this and other worlds in the FS setting in which North Korean trainees are treated as potential employees or business owners. The lectures are offered by Christian self-made business owners and professional employment agents, and are typically useful,

impressive, and lively. Among the new values listed above, it is the concept of sincerity (*seongsil*) that emerged as the most important attitude the migrants should have in order to be successful in South Korea. *Seongsil* in the FS lecture series means a complex set of mindful and bodily manners that include being modest, obedient, gentle, enduring, hardworking, and unselfish. *Seongsil* becomes more meaningful in a social system. That is, in a company setting, one is supposed to be obedient to his/her South Korean boss, and work hard with few complaints. In the case of a self-owned small business, s/he must serve their South Korean clients. One day after an impressive lecture delivered by Mr. Ko, a self-made business owner who once failed but was able to recover, director Kang of FS added his own comments;

There may be two reactions in your mind. First, ‘Wow, what a huge sum of money, is it possible?’ Second, ‘I don’t want to have to work so hard again even in South Korea’. Remember those whose passage has been so hard among “*Uri sik-gu-deul*” (our family, the graduate migrants between 2001 and 2005) -- they are all successful in their business. For example, there is a plasterer. Although you can think ‘hard work again?’ he has now two South Korean employees. He does not tell them he is from North Korea though. You can be rich like Mr. Ko. His business is one we can emulate. Of course, there is also the case of the man who graduated in 2002 and failed since the company system was unstable. It seems really a great occupation. Further, Mr. Ko is willing to give you preferential treatment. The only thing you need is *Seongsil* (sincerity). Above all, you must be sincere, if not, we will all lose face.

In his account, it is clear that director Kang projects his assumptions onto the migrants. His premise is that the migrants “don’t want to do such hard work again in the South,” implying that they are somewhat lazy, lack will, and are dependent. Such negative attitudes are simply interpreted as a byproduct of Juche, and thus what they need is to be “sincere” not only for themselves but also for the FS “family.” The family metaphor in relation to the migrants in a church setting is also considerable. The migrants are perceived as “returning sons and daughters” and are situated as younger siblings in

the Korean family system. Similar to how Sheila Jager (2003) analyzes the Korean War Memorial, a carving of a South Korean big (literally) brother soldier embracing a younger and smaller North Korean soldier; North Korean migrants are automatically subordinated in the Korean ethnic hierarchy. In this light, the *seongsil* represents familial, social, and religious obligation that the newcomers are expected to put in place of the outdated Juche bodily habit. Further, *seongsil* is not merely emphasized in verbal language. FS also provides lectures for North Korean migrants as to how to behave properly in front of their boss, co-workers, and clients. The lectures include how to bow, smile, dress, walk, shake hands, and talk.

How and to what degree then do the migrants interpret and willingly accept the new values and attitude reforms? Do they agree that Juche ideology ruined their soul and body? Do they believe that if they work hard following the instructions they learn in FS that they could then succeed in this-worldly life, and ultimately return to the North in glory? What difference do they feel between the FS programs and the ones that they received in Hanawon, the government settlement facility, and what they learn in a job training center? Through observation I was able to ascertain their reactions and some answers. However, I soon realized the ways that they react and respond to South Korean services such as the FS program are not explicitly expressed in spoken language at the time that they receive support services. Another aspect of FS is the space and time appropriated by the migrants in silence. I will show that the FS classroom can be appreciated for its multiple meanings and dimensions when examined beyond the official programs.

Heterogeneous Classroom

I would like to propose that the FS classroom is a symbolic and metaphoric contact zone mediating the relationship and interaction between North and South Koreans. The FS classroom as a metaphor extends to a place and time during the ten-minute-long break time every hour.⁶⁷ While joking with each other in the classroom, sipping a cup of coffee in the hallway, and smoking cigarettes outside the building, the behavior and small talk the migrants share are crucial to understanding the construction of their identity. Restrooms, classrooms, hallways—wherever they are during their breaks—are spaces in which the migrants make their own cultural time and space, thus in many ways appropriating FS to their own ends (see Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997 for a concept of ethnic space and time). They gather as a small group or as a couple and enjoy sharing vulgar North Korean topics in their northern dialect for fun, information about jobs, any news from North Korea, chit chat about South Korean soap operas, newly purchased cell phones, clothes and accessories, and information about skin care and health treatments, and on and on. I was often told that one of main reasons for coming to the FS was for hanging out with “*Uri saramdul*, or us” in that they could resolve the stress they accumulated throughout the daily labor of working under South Koreans by communing with other North Koreans.

In the same vein, it is necessary to move my angle of vision from the lecture platform where South Korean Christian elites deliver good words, to where North Korean trainees are sitting in the chairs. While sitting with them in the classroom, what was interesting was to feel how they created strategies in their own ways, while diluting,

⁶⁷ Anthropological methodology suggests that an ethnographer participate and observe not only in public time and space, but also in private or informal time and space in order to better understand the ways in which a particular group of people produces subcultures (Denzin 2000).

reinterpreting, ignoring, and filtering the discourses and lessons that the South Korean lecturers offered.

Just like other school classrooms, a dominant power is created from the positioning of the lecture platform up front and power descends down to the back rows. Also like other common classrooms, not all of the audience pays full attention to every single word and lesson delivered from the lectern. While South Korean Christian lecturers enthusiastically teach how to fill out resumes, how to build good human relationships at the workplace, how to succeed in life and other such useful things, among the North Korean trainees sitting in the chairs, there were various “other” deeds that I could catch glimpses of: falling asleep, sending messages by cell phone, scribbling on paper, chitchatting with the person next to them, and so on. These behaviors suggest that not all the intentions and efforts of the FS program can be absorbed—even by those who seemed to listen carefully in the classroom.

By extension, the FS weekly group bible study that the trainees are supposed to participate in (although not all can do so) is also a window through which we can get a sense of the micro-interactions between the trainees and their southern counterparts. There are four groups and each meets at around dinnertime once a week. A group bible study is normally organized with opening prayer, reading verses, and comments that are all led by a South Korean who is an elder, a deacon, or a staff member. Soon after the formal study, they have an evening meal together that is prepared by a host or hostess. The meal is a “hybrid”—a combination of Yanbian, North Korean, and South Korean styles. There is a formal regulation against drinking, but if a South Korean leader does not come to the study, they enjoy drinking and chitchatting instead of reading the Bible.

Each member in a group tends to host the weekly meeting by turns, and they come to visit each other's apartment complexes (most North Korean adults live in small, leased apartments assigned by the government after the *Hanawon* training) and comment on the host/hostess' sense of decoration, family relations, and so forth. All these aspects are likely to be seen as multi-functions of the group bible study in which North Korean participants not only learn a Christian way of thinking and manners and share personal wishes through its formal event, but also experience their own cultural and ethnic belonging.

By describing the heterogeneous FS classroom, I wanted to uncover a hidden dimension that exists in a lively manner in between and betwixt public performances—lectures, regular cell meetings for bible study, and Sunday worship that are not undermined by this hidden “break” in which they can “breathe,” but rather integrated in ordinary practices. In this light, the notion of transcendence that I discussed earlier in this chapter may be understood as a state that allows the various and even competing desires and powers to coexist. Interestingly, however, FS staff members as coordinating agents wishing to manage the regular and public programs without secular interventions (the other deeds, drinking at the cell meeting, et cetera.) tend to devalue the “break” dimension, but instead insist on fixing, erasing, or concealing. Thus, tensions arise and accelerate in the case of an intensive ritual, which demands its participants to firmly follow the regulations.

HEALING THE NORTH KOREAN SOUL

Broadly, it can be said that the FS calendar from beginning to end is organized as a rite of passage aimed at the migrants. At a micro level of observation, the healing camp I participated in can also be seen as a rite with the phases that Victor Turner (1979) elaborates.⁶⁸ Instead of illustrating each phase in detail, however, I want to shed light on the ways in which the ritual as a process and as a series of symbols ended up having multiple meanings and contradictory and ambiguous feelings among the participants. In particular, I argue that misunderstandings of signs and symbolic performances accentuated the unprecedented and very delicate cultural borderline between South Koreans and their northern counterparts.

Yet, with this point I do not mean to make a teleological criticism of FS and the wider Christian mission. What seems to be a failure may crystallize as a different form of flexibility and transcendence in Christianity. Webb Keane stresses, “Christianity in whatever form it takes is embedded in ordinary practices, it creates recurrent practical means by which these concepts [i.e. iconoclasm, spirituality, conscience, agency, worldliness, and transcendence] can be lived in concrete terms (Asad 1993), even when the result contradicts official ideology” (2006:310). As a form and means of Korean evangelical Christianity, Freedom School bears those concepts and invites further discussions.

⁶⁸ According to van Gennep, Victor Turner elaborates “three phases in a rite of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation” claimed to be present in almost all types of rites. The first phase of separation includes “symbolic behavior which represents the detachment of the ritual subjects from their previous social statuses...to a new state or condition.” In the phase of transition, “margin” or “limen” (threshold), the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity.” The third phase “includes symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society” (1979:16).

This section thus will lead us to review the limits and potentials of Korean evangelical nationalism in the vision of “the future of the nation.” The following consists of two subsections. Instead of going through all the details of the ritual process, I focus on the underlying intentions of the healing ritual and its outcomes.

Designing North Korean Healing

In mid-September of 2006, the FS designed a two-day outdoor activity for North Korean trainees. The purposes of the camp were (1) to heal wounded souls through an experience of God’s advent, (2) to make them find the true dignity of their existence within God, and (3) to cut the past life off and rebuild a new life chain with Jesus Christ. It was apparent that the ultimate goal of the camp was to convert the North Korean migrants. Historically, this goal is not that new, as throughout the history of Christianity the ultimate healing is completed when the people convert to Christianity (Porterfield 2000; Wightman 2007). The list of purposes which are short and concise also represents a more or less negative image most South Korean adults have of North Korean migrants—their soul and heart are wounded, their self-esteem is low, and their past lives are all ruined and contaminated.

Based on her three-year long missionary work for North Korean migrants in the South, Chu Sŏn-ae, an emeritus professor in a theological university, argues that church is the only agency that can save North Korean migrants and it is God’s special and precious calling for the Korean Church in this era (2008: 26-27). She warns that North Koreans are different from other foreign migrants because their whole life is full of a series of unimaginable sufferings. They must be seen as physically and mentally disabled

patients: their victim mentality, grudge, anger, hostility, frustration, and such a wounded heart prevents them from receiving any sermons and words. She proclaims that without deep understanding and love, ordinary people would be easily discouraged from serving them. It is only those who experience God's love who can take the frustration about the obstacles one will face in serving the migrants and giving them true help.

As in various training systems, the "true" help has normally been designed to assimilate them into the Korean capitalist system in as short a time as possible. Similar to the US homeless sheltering industry, as Lyon-Callo (2006) problematizes, it was considered as an urgent and taken-for-granted task for South Korean agencies (government and civil organizations) to transform the northerners into productive citizens not only for themselves but also for national unification.⁶⁹

The Healing Camp was not only meant as an intensive turning point provided by FS for their trainees to convert to new Christian citizens. It was also a contact zone in which South Korean Christians, North Korean migrants, and God/Jesus Christ were expected to interact with each other. From a South Korean standpoint, North Korean trainees were supposed to play the role of novices, "temporarily undefined, [and] alive to the asocial world" (Turner 1979: 19). According to the FS 2006 calendar, the healing camp had taken place in the middle of the term—North Korean participants had passed half way through the FS course while getting familiar with most Christian ways. In fact, around ten North Korean migrants who were not willing to follow the rules and ways required of them had already left FS. The rest of the participants came to know what they

⁶⁹ South Korean governmental support programs for North Korean migrants are being modified almost every year. Although it has been developed as a long-term (circa 5 years) aid project in recent years, the main purpose is to quickly train the migrants as independent citizens. For more information on the South Korean social welfare system, see chapter 1.

were supposed to do in a certain time and space. In the same vein, FS staff members seemed to believe that it was time for the migrants to feel God at a sacred place.

Understanding Symbols in Different Ways

The more I talked with participants at the camp, it became clear to me that they interpreted and understood the symbolic practices in different ways. This was illustrated in a conversation I had with some women at the camp. Eun-sil, in her mid-40s, was rather annoyed at the ritual process in which she was “forced” to recall past memories and in another conversation with a woman who had seemed “possessed” during prayer. The first time I was at the camp, I was taking a walk with several female North Korean migrants while enjoying sunshine and fresh air during a break. I asked a casual “how are you” question, and did not expect a serious response. However the response that followed was unexpected:

Me: “How was your last night? Did you feel good?”

Eun-sil: “To be honest, I didn’t like last night. It was bad for me to be forced to repent. I have no idea why I was made to recall those sufferings again. I had tried to drown my sorrows by drinking day after day upon arrival in the South, and just recently I resolved to change my life. But I go almost crazy whenever I am forced to remember those bad memories...”

Eun-sil’s reaction to the healing ritual the previous night was the exact opposite of what FS was hoping to elicit. Not all North Korean migrants have gone through the same difficulties, but most of the bad and tragic memories they have had could be seen as strategies they had to inevitably choose, or kinds of misfortunes they happened to face while undergoing desperate social-economic-political situations. Memories of family separation by death, the nights of being chased by Chinese policemen, the moments of

human trafficking and sexual abuse, their children who have been left behind, and so on, are what most North Korean individuals have experienced in repeated ways. It may be a personal survival strategy for these individuals to bury the memories in the past.

For some North Korean migrants, religious sins and past wrongdoings are not different, as seen in the history of the Christian mission throughout the world. While recognizing one's voluntary disconnection with God is significant in the former category, the latter entails mistakes, faults, intentional legal and moral violations in general, and idol worship—what Mr. Kang calls Kim Il-Sung ideology, particularly within the North Korean migrant population. In the end, even personal wrongdoings and past traumas are politicized and totalized in evangelical nationalist terms. In addition, there are quite a few migrants who feel guilty, as if they are traitors. They had a strong sense of nationalism based on Juche ideology, but in escaping their “motherland,” they see themselves as having become “selfish traitors” who, in betraying their country and even the rest of their family members, sought only to live for themselves.

In other words, their identities have been transformed from a Communist national being who once dared to die for “our motherland” against US imperialism (as promoted by the North Korean regime) to individual refugees seeking food resources for themselves and family—selfish traitors in North Korean terms (see chapter 1 & 4), and to division minorities who need to assimilate into the South Korean capitalist system. In the healing ritual process, they were urged to be born again as Christians who were required to repent their past and be reborn to Christianize a reunified nation in the future. In this regard, South Korean evangelical discourse works to politicize North Korean sufferings and re-nationalize their identity reconfiguration. As such, individual efforts to overcome

the past traumas are replaced by something national through various rites for recovering spirituality. Rather than as an individual and family group economic migration, South Korean Christians who lead the various religious programs tend to interpret their northern counterparts' passage as one signifying a political, national, and evangelical pilgrimage where they were predestinated to escape from the "dark northern part," and be led by the "light of gospel" toward the "southern land of freedom." The slight differences between North Korean migrants and their southern counterparts in interpreting the meanings of migration in turn happen to produce another conflict between them regarding the attitudes and perceptions toward religious rites for spiritual restoration.

Moreover, the methods of the Pentecostal healing ritual, including loudly praying together, speaking in tongues, crying, and so on, are not familiar to most North Korean migrants. This set of rituals is in fact a particular form of culture and language in South Korean Christianity, and are particular to the Pentecostal Christianity to which the FS belongs. While South Korean staff members of the FS often reproach the northern trainees for their hesitance and passiveness in the rituals, I propose that the North Korean trainees' conversion would not be complete until they became used to this specific form of cultural performance (see Harding 1987, 2000; Lester 2005; Stromberg 1993; Wiegele 2005).

Nonetheless, one may propose that North Koreans in general are good at "performing" crying with joy or deep emotion. A common scene on North Korean TV was North Korean citizens in their best dress—men in western suits or a national uniform

called *Inminbok*, people's clothing,⁷⁰ while women wore traditional Korean costumes—jumping up and down, holding and shaking fake flowers, shouting “Manse, manse (cheers, cheers)!” and tearfully crying before their great leader Kim Jong-Il. Some interpret this scene as an exemplary sign representing Kim's idol cult, so they assume that all North Koreans are good at “performing” a similar form of religious practice. Yet my ethnographic details suggest that for some migrants the meaning of crying was something neither understandable nor acceptable as a sign of “openness” before God, but rather a “strange” or “what-the-hell-are-they-doing?” type of action.

These contradictory understandings between South Koreans and the migrants bring to light the notion of “sincerity” in religious terms. Previously I pinpointed *seongsil*: sincerity as a key value that the newcomers must acquire if they are to accomplish living a successful life in the South. In the Protestant version, Keane defines sincerity as that which “characterizes a relationship between words and interior states. To be sincere is to utter words that can be taken to be isomorphic with beliefs or intentions” (2006:316-7). While Keane maintains the relationship between language and heart, in the North Korean migrants' term for the condition it is integrity: an integrated mind and body, an integrated condition between his/her speaking and behaving. While “language” or “uttering language” is always important in the Western and evangelical tradition, North Korean as well as South Korean criticisms aimed at evangelical leadership often rest on the importance of consistency in speaking and action. In chapter 2 I mentioned the series of scandals involving some prominent Protestant leaders. The degree of spirituality in Korea is not solely attached to “speaking” but “behaving.”

⁷⁰ *Inminbok* is often translated as a “Mao's jacket” in English, but following the North Korean meaning, I call it “people's clothing” instead.

A sincere believer in the Christian domain can be translated in Korean as a true believer (*ch'amdoen sinangin*), one who practices his/her belief, and the “true” believing is practicing, not speaking. Thus, as I mentioned above, a North Korean migrant woman’s reaction of “what-the-hell-are-they-doing?” to the Pentecostal healing ritual can be seen simply as a matter of “learning particular linguistic and ritual grammar.” That is, it was just her unfamiliarity with the specific ritual practice. South Koreans must know that the scene of North Korean masses’ “manse!” is rarely experienced by people in other provincial areas outside of Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. Indeed, over 80 percent of the migrants are from the cities close to the Sino-North Korean border, far away from the capital.

On the other hand, her reaction can inform on the increasing number of North Korean Christians who stop attending church, largely due to the fact that they witness hypocritical behavior in their church pastors or members. Recall that Mrs. Yang in chapter 4 also brings out this point in her conversation with me, and not in her conversion narrative. Sincerity in Christianity is also related to *seongsil*, which I translate in English as sincerity. A *seongsil-han saram*, or sincere person in one’s social life is equivalent to *ch'amdoen sinangin* or a sincere believer in church. At this point, we can acknowledge that sincerity emerges as a contested and competing discourse and practice among the co-ethnic interactions between the migrants and their southern counterparts. Due to the asymmetrical power relations in South Korean hegemonic discourse, it is the migrants who are expected to acquire “sincerity” which South Koreans claim is missing in North Koreans. The following vignette reveals the tension or miscommunication between the two actors in interpreting the healing outcome.

At one point during the healing camp, a young woman, So-yong, looked possessed by spirit. Her face was wet with tears, her arms and legs were shaking, and the symptoms were not medically related. Nonetheless, she did not accept that it was a spirit possession. After this, I happened to have a conversation with her and Chae-eun, who at the time were both attending a theological school.

Me and Chae-un: Good morning!!

So-yong: I am fine today, but I think I still have a headache.

Chae-eun: Did you take a pain killer?

So-yong: Yes, I did, but I think it'll get better soon.

Me: I guess you were possessed by Holy Spirit, weren't you?

So-yong: Well, I don't know what it was. I just could not move. Maybe because I were too tired, since I haven't taken a rest in recent days.

Chae-eun: Did you work hard lately?

So-yong: Yes, I had taken exams. You know it's hard to read books and there are lots of things to memorize...So I haven't slept for three days ...

Interestingly, the conversation ended up becoming a friendly chitchat between two ladies who were interested in talking about their hometown and finding a social connection instead of discussing So-yong's possession state from the previous night. But for me it was striking that they concluded that So-yong fell to the floor not thanks to a spirit possession, but because of a bad health condition. Although they were sincere Protestants attending a theology college, they seemed not as interested in legitimizing their religiosity among themselves. The night before, Mr. Kang and Pastor Choi led the healing ritual for four hours. The two ministers practiced the "laying on of hands" on So-yong for over a half hour. The laying on of hands is a symbolic method to invoke the Holy Spirit in occasions of healing service, blessing, baptism, and so forth, in various denominations. Kang and Choi were allegedly good at practicing it for healing. The previous night, in fact, Kang and Choi were shouting "Go away! I command you in the

name of Jesus, go away!” It meant that they were practicing the laying on of hands to “cure” So-yong’s soul that was presumably possessed by a demon, not by the Holy Spirit.

Before I had the conversation with So-yong, I happened to be engaged in a short talk with Mr. Kang and pastor Choi. Kang whispered in a small voice, “Well, it was almost done, but eventually they didn’t fully open their minds.” And then he seriously stated, “You know we are all same nation (*han minjok*). I talked to myself one step more one step more... Last night, I felt that I was almost there. But they didn’t fully open... I don’t know, but there is something like a *glass* between us and them. I can’t break it. As I want to break it, they seem to make the glass thicker. I don’t know what the *glass* is and why I felt that way always...I think it may be due to the fact that they were drowned in Kim Il-Sung Ideology for too long...”

His last account manifests that what both Kang and Choi were attempting to do to So-yong was to remove the demon of Kim Il-sung from her soul. However, I witnessed the previous night that they failed and just let another female volunteer bring her to a room to rest. In that moment Kang lamented that he was not able to open their minds and exorcise Kimilsungism, but it reaffirmed the metaphorical glass between “us” and “them.” Referring to Kang’s perspective, So-yong’s state was precisely a spirit possession but by the inner demon, the deeply embodied ‘evil’ Juche. So-yong claimed it was caused by a burnt-out condition, fatigue that in turn was caused by carrying out heavy duties as a mother-student in her early 40s. Recalling the purposes of this camp—healing wounded souls, finding true dignity, and cutting of the past and rebuilding a new life—there might have been someone who experienced a conventional “blessing,” such as establishing a personal relationship with God, from this experience. If so, then we may

need to recognize that the relationship between God and the migrants is much easier to reconnect than the relationship between the migrants and South Korean Christians.

CONCLUSION

I have examined Freedom School as a multidimensional, heterogeneous figured world in which the spectra of chasm and negotiations of ideologies between North Korean migrants and South Korean evangelicals unfolds. The first part explored two different dimensions of the classroom metaphor. On the one hand, the FS is imagining itself as a social laboratory that provides essential programs to help selected migrants adjust to South Korea. I have demonstrated that with the notion of *seongsil*, or sincerity, the migrants are expected to erase the outdated Juche mindset and become productive citizens. On other hand, I have paid attention to a hidden zone and “break” time that do not belong to the formal programs. I attempted to illuminate that the migrants appropriate such between and betwixt space and time to make FS a more meaningful space for them.

The second part was devoted to illustrating the healing ritual, in particular its intentions and outcomes. It was first designed to mobilize the migrants to reestablish their personal relationship with God. But the rebuilding requires an absolute break from the past. The healing means thus a recovery of dignity by destroying Juche that is thought to remain in the migrants’ souls. After the healing ritual, however, I encountered unexpected reactions and interpretations from both sides. By analyzing three main opposite or ambivalent accounts, I open up the ambivalent nature of Korean evangelical nationalism for further discussions. In sum, I have pictured on-going conflicts,

negotiations, and miscommunications rather than reconciliation between the newcomers and South Korean Christians.

As for the causes and contents of conflicts which are largely unspoken in the name of love and blessing, my findings suggest that it is not only “the antagonistic identity constructs,” as Roland Bleiker argues while supposing a unified condition, “that emerged with the division of the peninsula that will undoubtedly survive and pose problems” (2005: 99) in the assimilation process between South Koreans and the migrants in the FS setting. But from the migrants’ standpoints, it is also the South Korean “myth of modernization” that is produced throughout; what most Koreanists call “compressed modernity” (Koo H. 2001; Cho H-j. 2000; Abelman 2003) and “culturalist view” embedded in the hegemonic sense of Korean ethnic homogeneity. For South Korean Christians, it is Juche ideology that contaminated the migrants’ mind and body. Such views accuse Juche of having caused the migrants’ refugee mentality. However, Korean psychologists and neuropsychiatrists have pointed out that 30 percent of the migrants show PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) caused by the famine and dangerous lifestyle in China, worsened by cultural shock in the South (Jeon W-t. 1997, 2000; Jeon W-t. et al. 2005; Hong C-h et al. 2005).

The degree of cultural shock may be much heavier than South Koreans assume. Lee Woong-pyung, who defected from the North by flying an MIG-19 fighter jet in 1983, passed away in May 4, 2002. He was only 48 years old. As a model “national hero” from the North, he was soon promoted from captain to major, worked as a professor at a Korean Air Force university, married the daughter of a professor in his school, and had two sons. He allegedly worked very hard, but collapsed one day due to an unexpected

illness. It was reported that before his death he often said “I have lived in Seoul more than a third of my entire life, but I haven’t fully assimilated in South Korean society yet - - just like oil is floating on the water.”⁷¹ His unfortunate and untimely death appeared to enunciate a reality that new arrivals from the North, whose numbers keep growing, were undergoing many difficulties in adjusting to South Korea.⁷²

South Korean scholars and civil organizations have considered the German unification case as an example of multi-dimensioned social transformations that the Koreans might prepare for in the near future (Kang M-k. and Wagner eds. 1995). The comparison between Korea and Germany has worked to mitigate the state manipulation of the “fantasy” of the unification and “myth” of ethnic homogeneity, at least in South Korea. Both have served as a way for the North and South antagonistic regimes to ease their totalitarian control over the people for decades. But now they seem to take on different shapes and meanings. On the one hand, people worry about the amount of so-called unification costs. Compared with the pre-unified Germany, the economic differences between the North and the South are so huge that there is concern that the unification may immediately lead to national bankruptcy. On the other hand, it is ethnic nationalism that is still pervasive in various forms that create the meanings of national unification.

⁷¹ Kim Minkseok Joongang Daily reporter’s news article, retrieved at www.vafa-kr.com (A virtual air force academy website).

⁷² Only two months after his death, however, the single largest number (468) of the migrants, divided into two groups, arrived in the South. It was planned and organized by a number of civil organizations. The Commission to Help North Korea Refugees (CNKR), the evangelical organization I mentioned in chapter 2, was one of them. This “planned defection”—Rev. Ch’un Gi-won called “planned entry”—angered the North and perplexed the South too. And two months after the incident, the United States Senate passed the North Korean Human Rights Act, which the South Korean government, liberal/progressive camps, and the North Korean regime did not welcome at all.

As I maintain, Korean ethnic nationalism rests on the belief in the shared
bloodline. It is a product of Korea's particular modern history—colonial experience,
national division by Big Powers, and post-Korean War Cold War identity politics have
contributed to the construction of ethnic nationalism (see Shin G-w. 2006). But I do not
support the idea that this ethnic consciousness is homogeneous and synonymous with a
decisive patriotism. Observers have often brought out several examples concerning the
increasing ethnic nationalism in the South; the first may be the spectacular scene of 2002
Seoul streets that were filled with hundreds of thousands of people wearing “Red Devil”
uniforms cheering their national soccer team in the Korea-Japan World Cup series. But
they have overlooked the other side of the scene in which some young people who were
the most enthusiastic leaders of the parade preferred Mild Seven (Japanese cigarettes) or
Malboro (American ones) to This (a cheap Korean cigarette). That is, this recent form of
ethnic nationalism is different from the earlier version that led the Encouragement of
Korean Production Movement during the 1920s colonial Korea. In this light, the
flexibility and appropriateness of recent ethnic nationalism, which can be seen as a
commodity in the highly market oriented Korean context, must be underlined in the
discussion of its relationship with other socio-cultural fields.

In the chapter “Ethnic nationalism and unification” of his book, Gi-Wook Shin
stresses that “South Koreans who have a strong belief in ethnic homogeneity understand
the complexities of the unification process and realize that there are indeed real barriers
between the two sides” (2006:199). His survey data used for the chapter look relatively
positive, because “Only 16.7 percent support ‘hegemonic unification’, saying that the
current South Korean system should be the basis of a unified Korea. In contrast, 31.8

percent support a unified Korea based on elements equally from North and South, suggesting willingness to accommodate” (2006: 200). His study on the relationship between ethnic nationalism and unification suggests a different perspective from that of Habermas (1996) and Grinker (1998) who were focused on the Korean belief in ethnic homogeneity that may ignore and oppress real differences between the two Koreas in the unification process. Shin argues that the belief serves to motivate South Koreans to pursue unification and “does not necessarily obscure the differences ... or promote hegemonic unification by the South” (2006: 201). In particular, his survey reveals that the younger generation tends to show more flexibility in terms of cultural tolerance than older people who distinguish North Korean ordinary people as victims of the communist regime (see also, Kim S. 2007; Lee S-j. 2006).

While Shin sheds light on a South Korean sense of ethnic homogeneity as a motif of national unification, Kim Young-soo’s study (2004) based on a survey with high school and college students supports that the ethnic consciousness or *tongp’o ūisik* facilitates their willingness to accept North Korean migrants in the South. For instance, the young South Koreans strongly agree with migrants settling in their same neighborhood and the idea that they should be cared for by a state welfare system.

But Kim also finds that college students are relatively more sensitive and somewhat intolerant to the matters that conflict with their socio-economic interests. That is, they tend to disagree that young North Koreans should be eligible for the Special Admission for Koreans Overseas in Korean universities and special employment which had been given to earlier “national heroes” in job markets. Kim points out that this ambivalence is part of the young South Korean generation’s attitudes toward their

imagined brothers and sisters from the North. South Korean evangelicals leading the right wing take tough action on the “Sunshine policy” and North Korea; for them, national unification is “meaningless” until North Korean society becomes one in which “religious freedom” and basic “human rights” are granted to all the people on the basis of a “free market economy” (Lee J-r. 2006). Rev. Kim Jin-hong, who has been playing a leading role in the political democratization since the 1980s, is now a leading figure of the right wing. Together with Rev. Seo Kyong-seok, his “conversion” to the right was shocking to the progressive and civil society groups in South Korea. Referring to his accounts that are now conceived as hegemonic discourses in the evangelical church, national unification is an outdated “conservative” fantasy. In his worldview, the leftists and socialists cannot find a place to reside. Over the past ten years, South Korean people have come to have plural imaginations about the next generation’s future. In the future, Korean history may observe increasingly dynamic, complicated, and multidimensional debates about the future—that future which is supposed to be carried out in pink-colored love with which FS migrants decorated their “I am the future of the nation!”

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

My dissertation is entitled “Free to Be: North Korean migrants and the South Korean evangelical church.” This title no doubt leaves readers with a question: Free to be what? Indeed, I am not willing to settle on a proper word or phrase to follow “free to be.” However, I have come to think that this seemingly incomplete phrase perhaps best represents the primary concerns that have stayed with me throughout this project. Namely: transcendence and reconciliation in tension with subordination, transgression, and alienation. The freedom to be, then, is simply to exist unfettered. In this vein, Anthropologist Webb Keane asserts that “transcendence haunts modernity in three unrealizable desires: for a self freed of its body, for meanings freed of semiotic mediation, and for agency freed of the press of other people” (Keane 2006: 310). As key characteristics of Christianity, this mode of transcendence is premised on a state of separation and yet it is unrealizable. For the Korean case, however, I contend that its Korean version may require a process of reconciliation of two separated subjects.

Over the past half a century, we have witnessed that as Arjun Appaduraj spotlights, our societies grow smaller and transnational flows of products accelerate peoples’ transcending activities across borders whether in the imagination or in practice. In the case of divided Korea, however, its people have hardly attempted to cross the ceasefire line to the other side. In the same vein, in each territory, few have fully dared to transcend the Cold War logic in their imagination or daily practices.

It is only as recently as ten years ago that the Korean geopolitical climate was drastically transformed. South Korean president Kim DJ promoted the normalization of

relations with the North Korean regime and visited Pyongyang for the first time in post-War Korean history. Accordingly, South Korean people began experimenting with vocabularies of reconciliation and cooperation that challenged antagonistic idioms of absorption and retaliation. I began my doctoral study in the United States when this peaceful mood was at its peak. I ambitiously carried out my research on North Korean migrants in a somewhat progressive nationalist frame of mind, idealizing that the process of Korean national unification should be inclusive, transcending Cold War ideologies and ethnic centrism.

As such, my project primarily proposed to seek an alternative to the Cold War subject. Namely, my interest lay in the becoming and being-made of post-division citizenship, by examining co-ethnic interactions between North Korean migrants, Korean-Chinese, and South Koreans in the transnational church network. As I maintain in my dissertation, it is the evangelical church that serves as the primary contact zone in which the migrants are mobilized to assimilate into the South Korean Christian capitalist system.

While carrying out my fieldwork, I discovered, however, that many of my findings ran counter to my previous optimistic ambition. In chapter 1, "North Korean Subjectivities in a Changing World," I argue that in the past, migrants were publicly celebrated as national heroes by anticommunist regimes. But today it is in the church and in the logic of conversion that they are empowered to criticize North Korea. For the church, North Korean migrant convert testimonies serve to modify and upgrade its anticommunism to that of God's divine calling of the North Korean mission, namely

evangelical activity in North Korea. The church has been thus an agent in the struggle against the normalization of inter-Korean relations.

In chapter 2, I thus historicize and elaborate on key components of Korean evangelicalism with a focus on the themes of suffering and salvation. In doing so, I wanted to highlight the rise of South Korean evangelical nationalism that is conflated with the theology of anticommunism (North Korean mission), prosperity, and pro-Americanism. The emergence of the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) in the late 1980s, the largest church alliance opposed to the progressive Protestants, marked the beginning of the evangelical church's political interventions in matters of national unification.

One of the main campaigns of the North Korean mission is Help North Korean Refugees. Chapter 3 examines the migrants' Christian encounters in China in light of human rights practices and discourses, and co-ethnic asymmetry, namely the power differential among different Koreans. In fact, few scholarly works have treated the migrants in the Sino-North Korean border area. I refer to their "Christian passage," to index their reliance on Christianity beginning in this region, and their conversion or miraculous experiences on their way from China to South Korea which are often central in their conversion narratives. By viewing the recent political field as a "market" borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu, I argue that North Korean migrants' Christian conversion is a cultural project to which they both forcefully and agentively submit themselves in search of a better life.

Chapters 4 and 5 are comprised of the stories of migrants in South Korean society and the church. Using the notion of the "figured world" by Dorothy Holland et al., I examine how they are subjectified as the "first [generation] unifiers" by both state policy

and church services. In chapter 4, I argue that the migrants are silenced by the liberal government for the sake of normalizing relations with the North. In contrast, they are encouraged to speak for the evangelical church aimed at both what they dub South Korean “leftists” regimes and North Korea. By analyzing conversion narratives as performance, I highlight that their conversion is not only an internal transformation from Juche to Christianity, but also a physical relocation from the North to the South. Further, I argued that their conversion narratives can be seen as a commodity in this specific religious and political market.

Chapter 5 is an ethnographic analysis of Freedom School (FS). I examine FS as a multidimensional heterogeneous figured space in which migrant trainees are expected to be born again as productive citizens and recover their dignity by establishing personal relationships with God. However, I discovered that there are cultural differences that mar the co-ethnic relationship between the migrants and their southern counterparts.

In sum, when I think about my primary commitment to transcendence and reconciliation, my ethnographic study seems to have ended up telling a very different story. Although the majority of migrants and church members rely on each other, their relationship has unexpected characteristics. For example, migrant convert conversion narratives in Korean evangelical language reveal that speech and belief are not always aligned; the belief in a shared bloodline or ethnic homogeneity is highly contested and destabilized; the sincerity and social credibility of evangelical discourses and practices aimed at North Korean migrants and North Korea are often questioned; and finally, the migrants are constantly suspect of being contaminated by the “evil” of *Kimilsung* cultism.

These are examples of the limits of the Korean evangelical space where North Korean migrants are both celebrated as new brothers and sisters, and differentiated as Others.

Yet on the other hand, North Korean converts position themselves as Other, who in turn claim themselves as “the chosen” ones whom God saved and called for a bigger work—North Korean mission. Their relationship with God is often depicted as more special than South Korean laymen and laywomen for the revival of Christianity in envisioning a reunified nation. It is an ultimate power of evangelical language that constitutes a Korean form of the Kingdom of God, a figured world, where North Koreans would be freed from “false” and “evil” personality worship. It is also a divine power that convinces the converts to believe that their future dreams can come true. Some seasoned presenters like Mrs. Yang in chapter 4 confess that physical and interior sufferings would never have subsided if they hadn't received God from and within their hearts. Sincerity is not measurable, but God knows how sincere your religiosity is.

Despite the Otherness, conversion tends to secure migrants position in the church community. South Korean churches are famous for their techniques of mobilizing their members to organize daily life with such church-centered activities as dawn prayer, cell meetings, volunteering, online participation, special prayers, short-term mission trips, and so on. Once a part of this circle, “secular” identities are deconstructed and reordered in the church hierarchy. Members can receive extra substantial benefits from these faith-based human relations. Free medical treatment, free tutoring, sometimes financial support, and most of all “love” and “care” instead of the mutual criticism found in the North, are other exemplary benefits.

However, I also observed other cases of migrants who became skeptical of Korean Christianity because of the very human relations in the church hierarchy and what God has done for North Korea. Privately and indirectly, some criticize the fact that there are Christian leaders who abuse the migrant issue for their own political interests and to grow their own church. Others find it unfair that God has cursed only the northern part of the peninsula. The transcendence proposed by Keane is not transparent but instead ambiguous in the process of North Korean conversion. Ultimately and unfortunately, my ethnographic findings and the logic of North Korean conversion suggests that there is little possibility of reconciliation and coexistence between Christianity and North Korean Juche ideology. In the Korean evangelical figured world, only one can survive and it will be in the form of a Christianized reunified Korean nation.

GLOSSARY

BDM: Biblical Discernment Ministries

CCK: The Christian Council of Korea

CCL: Chosun Christian League

Ch'öndogyo: A South Korean religion of the Heavenly Way

CNKR: The Commission to Help North Korea Refugees

DMZ: the Demilitarized Zone

Durihana: Literally means Two for One. One of the South Korean missionary organizations that carry out a mission to rescue North Korean refugees from China into South Korea

FS: The Freedom School

Hanawon: House of Unity, a South Korean government facility for North Korean migrant resettlement in South Korea

KNCC: National Council of Churches in Korea

Koryö yönbangje: The Democratic Federal Republic of Koryo (DFRK), North Korean official proposal for a reunified Korean nation-state form

KWMA: The Korea World Mission Association

LFNKR: Life Funds for North Korean Refugees, an international organization

Ppalgaengi : Literally, “Reds” but akin to “Commies,” a pejorative term referring to pro-communists

Pukhan it'al chumin: North Korean migrants

Pukpang sön'gyo: Northward mission

Sinang ganchŭng: Korean term for religious testimonies

Sinch'ön: Massacre

Sunshine Policy: A term for the North Korean policy initiated by the Kim Dae Jung administration (1998-2002)

SWIM: The Society for World Internet Mission

Taesŏngkongsŏ: A South Korean joint interrogation center

Talbuk-nanmin: North Korean refugees

Tonghak religion: Eastern Learning

TSPM: Three-Self Patriotic Movement church in China

WCC: World Christian Council

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